

914.7 B87

Brown \$2.75

This Russian
business

JAN '34

Acc. No. 791506

163321

22 FEB

161329

12 MAR

181119

9 APR

87470

914.7 B87

Keep Your Card in This Pocket

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for four weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on this card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.



Public Library
Kansas City, Mo.

Keep Your Card in This Pocket

BERKOWITZ ENVELOPE CO., K. C., MO.

KANSAS CITY, MO. PUBLIC LIBRARY



0 0001 0149071 2

DATE DUE

[illegible]

This Russian Business

75-1514-15-2498-102/14

RECEIVED
JUL 10 1964
04

PUBLIC LIBRARY
KANSAS CITY

This Russian
Business

by

E. T. Brown



Boston and New York
Houghton Mifflin Company

1933

YHAKH: JLDHAT
YTD 8A20A3
OM

914.7
B87

www Ap 6786

All rights reserved

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
UNWIN BROTHERS LTD., WOKING

SWN 275

SE 28 '33

791506

CONTENTS

I.	The Red Room	7
II.	Enter the Five Years Plan	23
III.	This Camaraderie	30
IV.	Class Distinctions	34
V.	Immigrants	40
VI.	Rubbing Shoulders	49
VII.	Odious Comparisons	57
VIII.	"U.S.S.R. in Construction"	62
IX.	How much is a Rouble?	69
X.	Living Communally	85
XI.	Hard and Soft	94
XII.	Sermons in Stones	111
XIII.	The Changing Landscape	125
XIV.	Russia and the Church	130
XV.	A Censorship or Two	158
XVI.	The Last Word Wins	175
XVII.	Politics and Terrorism	195
XVIII.	The Use of Force	214
XIX.	When Bolshevism Fails	235
XX.	After Bolshevism Succeeds	241
	Index	255

THIS RUSSIAN BUSINESS

I

The Red Room

WHEN AUGUSTUS PROPOSED to take me for a trip to Russia he explained that it would give me an opportunity to see Things as they Really Are. I contested this (as it seemed to me) over-weening expectation as well as I could, saying that if one were to see anything as unusual and surprising as that, it would surely be necessary to stay at least six months, and to have a competent knowledge of the language before we started, both of which were out of the question. For the rest, it seemed to me that I shouldn't see any further through a brick wall just for having my nose rubbed against it. Besides, there were so many people at home who could (and did) tell me about things as they really are, that it seemed a kind of reflection on them to insist on a more or less perfunctory personal inspection.

This incautious trailing of my coat started a discussion, in which Augustus wiped the floor with me, and the upshot was that we did go to Russia. Whether we saw things as they really are is a question on which (as I confidently hope) my great-grandsons will make up their minds one of these days. But at present I do not think that I know essentially any more about Russia than I did before I went there. Superficially, of course, I have learnt something. I know the kind of soup they give you to eat, and how uncomfortable railway travelling is, and how many roubles go to the pound. But I do not feel that any of my deeper doubts have been solved, or that I found in Leningrad or Moscow the key to any of the riddles which oppress my mind (and your mind) in London.

This Russian Business

The agnostic point of view in politics is, most unhappily, not so easily shaken, nor at such small cost. This is sometimes explained by saying that agnostics are at bottom more stupid than other men, and that refusing to exert one's mind is a feeble sort of attitude. This argument almost convinces me, but I cannot quite get rid of a feeling that it is in reality more difficult to sit on a fence than to fall off it.

We started off in a Soviet ship for Leningrad. There were about twenty more tourists on board, but the only one I remember very distinctly was a lady school teacher whom I suspected from the first of Communist tendencies. She used to contradict Augustus very freely, which left me more leisure for other things than I should otherwise have had.

We were all inclined to be curious about that ship. A ship is always rather intriguing, especially a foreign ship. And then somehow one was not used to thinking of Russia as a place that had ships. "A Russian ship" was a novel and striking phrase, rather like "an Italian prairie" or "an Icelandic millionaire." The Muscovite and the sea did not seem to mix. The proper setting for Russian life seemed to be steppes, not ships: one's imagination needed plains and pine forests, dust, mud, villages, sledges, dogs, wolves, and several feet of snow. Nevertheless, it was clear that the thing did exist, and one's imagination girded up its loins and tried to guess what it would be like. At any rate it would be different. It would be a piece of Russia, and of modern Socialist Russia, one supposed. And that started new speculations. How did Socialism and ships fit in together? That was a new idea, too. Somehow, all the Utopian descriptions of the Socialist State seemed to have forgotten seafaring. In *Looking Backward*, for example, there were all sorts of descriptions of what Socialist fac-

The Red Room

tories would be like, and cities, and farms, and concerts, and theatres and things like that, yes, even an account (long before Marconi) of how the Socialist citizen would listen to sermons (sermons!) on the wireless. But I could not remember anything much about ships. Nor did any of the standard descriptions of the horrors of modern Communism work out that problem in any detail, as far as I could recall. Well, it must have been worked out, more or less, and we should soon know. Would it be really different at all? Was there any reason why one should expect to know a Socialist ship when one saw it?

Augustus said he thought it *would* be different. There would probably be no discipline to speak of, and the decks would be filthy. He told us gloomy stories of how bad cockroaches could be in neglected ships. . . . But it wouldn't be so bad if only the steering gear was looked after and kept in reasonable trim. As for the engines, it would probably be all right. Nearly all the engineers in foreign ships were Scotchmen. This last statement seemed to me to have a distinctly literary flavour about it. I felt certain I had read some such thing, but I could not think where. And although Augustus always knows that kind of thing, it did not seem to be a case in which one could very well ask him.

My first impression was that the *Jan Rudzutak* was exactly like any other ship. She was as clean as a new pin, and she was kept like that during the whole voyage. A careful search disclosed neither cockroaches nor Scotchmen on board. I remembered that the proper test (for Scotchmen, not cockroaches) is to put your head into the engine-room and call out "Mac!" in a loud voice. I did not do that, because I was not sure but that "Mak" in Russian might mean something aggressive, and Augustus had warned me that one must be extremely careful to keep one's tongue

This Russian Business

between one's teeth, as the secret police were everywhere, and all policemen were stupid, even secret ones. But though the golden test was never applied, it became quite clear by other means that the whole of that ship's company were Russians of one sort and another.

As far as one could see with the naked eye, so to speak, the work of the ship went on exactly in the same way as on any other ship. In fact, Augustus says that for the merchant navy of a revolutionary state, these Russian sea-dogs showed a deplorable lack of originality. Instead of blowing horns or beating drums to mark the change of watches, as they might have done, they tamely struck the conventional bells, the usual number of bells at the ordinary times. They washed down the decks in the same stodgy fashion, and whenever there was a really fine day they put wet paint on all the parts of the railing where you usually leaned and looked at the view. Sailors are like that. They wake up one morning and see a beautiful sunrise. "Aha! they exclaim, rubbing their horny hands with glee, "a fine day! Let's go on deck and paint something!" Augustus had led me to believe that Russian sailors would be more human. But they aren't.

Taking it all round, I confess to being distinctly disappointed in the ship, until the day when Augustus found out that there was a ship's Soviet. It was on the same occasion that the School Teacher discovered the Red Room. This seemed very promising. But we stuck at that point for quite a long time. It was rather difficult to find out just what the ship's Soviet deliberated about, or just what force its conclusions had when the deliberations were over. In fact, I am not quite sure that we ever really did get to the bottom of it. But some things did become clear little by little; stray bits of concrete information dropped like manna by the wayside while Augustus wrestled with the

The Red Room

Muscovite about abstract points of Marxist doctrine. Augustus would often be too busy with the main argument to notice, but the School Teacher, who has a passion for collecting and registering Facts, used to dodge about (so to speak) between the legs of the combatants picking up these unregarded pearls, very much like an active chicken desperately picking up grains of corn before they are trodden into the mud.

But the Red Room was easier than that, and perhaps it ought to come first. It was situated aft, beyond the well-deck. One reached it through the crew's dining and recreation saloon, a very spacious room, nearly square, and flanked on either side by the crew's cabins. We poked into these here and there: they were pretty much like ordinary passenger cabins, some with two berths and some with four. The recreation room was used, more or less, by the whole ship's company. Everybody seemed to be welcome there, and everybody went there at times, passengers and officers both included. There was often music in the evenings, sometimes a wireless broadcast (mostly from the Leningrad station) and sometimes a concertina and a pair of fiddles. And either there or on the well-deck, according to the weather, a promiscuous crowd of officers, crew, first-class passengers, second-class passengers, and third-class passengers, all danced together, or at least such of them as knew how to dance and could find partners. There were even (I confess) a few unscrupulous and abandoned persons who found partners and danced without knowing how.

Augustus at first looked on this social hotchpotch of ranks and classes with a somewhat doubtful eye, but he brightened up after a night or two, and even took his own part in the revels. Once he had broken the ice there was no holding him. I think he had decided, after some hesitation, that these goings on need not be set down as the result of

This Russian Business

equalitarian doctrines (which would have imposed on him a duty of disapproval) but might reasonably be attributed to the well-known Bohemian strain in the racial character of the Slavs, which an artist and playwright (did I say that Augustus writes plays?) was almost bound to applaud. Besides, Augustus is not really a snob, in spite of his Johnsonian theories about the necessity of subordination, and as a matter of fact he rather liked that sort of free and easy atmosphere. But I don't think he cared to let himself go until he had his theoretical defence ready, in case his position were attacked by any contentious person. Nobody ever did attack him as far as I know, but he seized an opportunity to explain to me at some length the racial bonhomie of the Slavs and their natural and charming Bohemianism, which is how I come to know about those things.

We proceed (through the whirling throng, and by dint of squeezing between the fiddler and the door) to the Red Room. This turns out to be a rather narrow, oblong chamber running across the width of the ship. It is painted deep red on walls and ceiling, with the crossed sickle and hammer in gold high up on the wall fronting the door, and underneath that symbol the motto: "Workers of the World, Unite!" also in letters of gold. In the place of honour hangs a large portrait of Lenin, and less conspicuously, several other portraits, Jan Rudzutak, the People's Commissioner for Transport, after whom the ship is named, the grizzled face of Karl Marx completely surrounded by enormous quantities of bushy hair growing energetically out of it in all directions, Stalin, and one or two more. There is a long table in the middle covered with green baize. Benches against the walls, and a few chairs. A large book-case on the right. That was about all.

Now there is nothing much in that. It might have been

any sort of a room. In fact, it seemed rather disappointing. We almost came to the conclusion that the only red thing about it was the upholstery, and that it was called by that name only for prosaic purposes of identification. We had probably misunderstood altogether the tone of voice used by our informants. Evidently they had merely spoken quite casually of the red room, thereby distinguishing it from the blue room and the green room and the little room under the stairs. Whereas we had been thinking that they meant the Red Room, in capital letters, and that the words were spoken with just the faintest undertone of excitement, as when a schoolboy mentions the Office where he gets walloped, or the Pantry, where he is irregularly fed.

But after some time we found beyond doubt that it really was the Red Room, with a prescriptive right to capital letters, and that although nothing very exciting or exotic ever happened there, the room thus set apart was nevertheless in some ways a symbolic and significant place.

For, as we found later, it is not only the *Jan Rudzutak*, and not only the Russian ship, that has its red room. The Red Room, or the Red Corner, is now a universal Russian institution in every place where a number of people live or work to any extent in common. There is a Red Room in every factory, a Red Room in a railway station, on a collective farm; there are Red Rooms in army barracks and Red Corners in tenement blocks, apartment houses, and communal lodging-houses. And there are Red Rooms (or corners) in all schools.

Its use and purpose varies to some extent according to the size and character of the permanent or temporary community which uses it. It is of course always the meeting place of the community or its representatives, the factory committee or house committee, or as the case may be. Here the workers, or if they are too numerous, or the

This Russian Business

question is a less important one, an elected council, meet to consult about the common interests and to determine on concerted action. Here grievances are thrashed out; here improvements are decided on, and here, in the last resort, any disciplinary measures may be decreed. The Committee (or perhaps one ought to keep calling it the Soviet, on the same principle that Russian distances must never be anything but *versts*), the Soviet, then, meets in the Red Room under the portrait (or bust) of Lenin. But the room is much more than a committee room. It is a recreation room as well, and a place for the actual inmates or members to retire away from the public (in case the place is one where the general public comes and goes). On the ship, for example, you were free of the outer recreation room, but in the Red Room you were definitely a visitor; you went there upon an invitation, and you were definitely taken round and led out again. Often the Red Room has books in it, and newspapers, or there may be separate rooms for that, if the community is large enough and the housing crisis not too acute in that city or district. We heard of tenements where the Red Room was used for chamber music, and in many factories either it or some adjacent hall was used for "culture centres," societies for mutual improvement of one sort or another, lectures, classes, cinemas, or what not. In cases where there was space enough, many of these activities might have other rooms to themselves, but the Red Room always appeared to be the original seed and type of them all. The subsidiary rooms were all more or less full of the same spirit, all tinged with the same colour, as Augustus says, even if it was not visible to the eye. He used to call them the Pink Rooms.

But certainly the spirit was really there. There seemed to be an atmosphere about these Red Rooms and Red Corners

The Red Room

which separated them from ordinary recreation rooms and committee rooms and lecture halls, something faintly suggesting a background of religious enthusiasm and the altars of a mystic Church. You cannot help coming to see the Red Room as an emotional as well as a practical centre for the common life of each of these human hives, a focus, a rallying-point for the enthusiasms of its members, the sign and standard of all that they have in common, a reminder to them of their common inheritance, the symbol of the living Revolution.

That is distinctly the sort of impression one has of its place in the ideas and feelings of the Russian people, and especially the younger generations. How it has come to mean all that, is not so easy to say. No doubt, like most institutions with any real life of their own, it is partly the creation of popular feeling, and partly the result of initiatives from a comparatively small number of enthusiasts. But whatever the origins may be, the important thing is that the institution is obviously alive; it fills a popular want and corresponds to popular feeling, whether the people made with their own hands the thing they wanted, or accepted it ready-made. The question, "whose baby is it?" often seems simpler than it really is; and what is a paradox in physiology may be the obvious truth in the lives of communities where most healthy children are partly natural and partly adopted.

But Augustus says that the whole institution was obviously imposed from above, invented and maintained for purposes of propaganda, on exactly the same principle that a country clergyman starts tennis clubs and debating societies, carries on mothers' meetings and Dorcas clubs, and gets up concerts and sôcials, nay, even dances in these latter days, for the purpose of "keeping our young people together," or "keeping in touch with the congregation." "That's the whole principle of the thing!" he said, wagging

This Russian Business

a denunciatory finger. "You have these Red Rooms, these cinemas and lectures and reading clubs and all the rest of it, these 'culture centres,' in the local Bolshevik jargon, purely and simply for the purpose of pouring Communist doctrine into the people when they aren't looking, so to speak." At this the School Teacher protested a little. "But nobody has *told* us that there is any propaganda in the cinemas or lectures! How can you tell what sort of lectures they are? They may be lectures on anatomy for anything we know. Or pictures from Hollywood!" Augustus waived the objection aside. "You can bet your hat they reek with propaganda," he said. "It isn't in human nature to have a chance like that, and not use it. Besides, don't you see that there is a kind of mute propaganda in the Red Room itself? Always that damned colour! It gets on one's nerves after a bit. And then there's that eternal bust of Lenin!"

I dare say Augustus was perfectly right. It does not seem to me at all surprising that country parsons and Communist soviets should have come to similar conclusions about mass psychology, nor that their respective propaganda should have occasionally proceeded on something the same lines. And I do wholly agree with him about the probable unconscious suggestion exercised by the Red Room and its furnishings. Little things like that do have their effect. Only Augustus wants me to be shocked about it, and I can't. What is more, I don't feel that Augustus himself is really shocked at the people taking their opinions and even their emotions ready-made from a propaganda factory. What does shock him is that they should deal with the wrong factory. And of course he exaggerates a little; in fact, he has rather a bee in his bonnet about this propaganda business. He told me once that the Red Corner reminded him of the kind of little shrine one sees everywhere in

The Red Room

Catholic countries, with an image of the Virgin and her child, decked with offerings of flowers, and with tapers burning. He said they used to have lots of them in Russia, too, before the Orthodox Church was disestablished. When religious orthodoxy became a kind of political heresy, and Christianity was no longer the fashion, the universal Russian instinct for shrines had to express itself in a different way. So now they had Red Corners instead, and the busts of Lenin and Marx had taken the place of the ikons. He said he could almost believe that the Soviet began its sittings by burning incense and reciting a chapter from the works of Marx before proceeding to the business on the agenda-paper. Augustus is rather fond of these picturesque extravagances. But when you take away the frills, it seems to me that he is not far wrong. There really is some trace of that spirit. Only it is surely not peculiar to Bolshevik Russia. I believe an antique Roman house had a corner by the hearth where the family paid little attentions to the Penates, and by all accounts, the Chinese are accustomed to keep some inner room or special nook where they meditate on the merits of their ancestors. Not to mention Africa and the South Seas, where (if travellers may be believed) every village has a house for the images of the tribal gods. And the March of Progress does not seem to make very much difference to such practices, except to drive them underground, so to speak. The joss house instinct survives in all of us, and no less surely when it puts on a secular aspect. Every Victorian parlour had its album of family portraits, which were ritually contemplated on Sunday afternoons. And there was the framed picture of Queen Victoria over the mantelpiece, and the photograph of Disraeli or Gladstone (according to the political faith of the head of the household) displayed on some slightly less honourable wall. Has this nothing in common with

This Russian Business

ancestor-worship and the veneration of tribal gods? The same essential attitude runs through all these things, and if the emotions of the Victorian burgher were of a more diluted kind, one has to remember that most emotions were considerably diluted in that respectable and rather watery epoch.

And to come to our own times, is there not a faint odour of the joss house about our reverent attitude towards things like the Lord Mayor's Show, and Guy Fawkes Day, and the opening of Parliament, and the inspiring spectacle of the Lord Chancellor mystically seated on a sack of wool? Not to mention the Horse Guards, and the British Constitution, and *The Times*.

Augustus gave me to understand that he disliked the colour of the Red Room simply because it was aesthetically offensive, garish, loud, and flaunting. But of course he really disliked it for the same reason that the Russians liked it, namely, because the colour in itself was symbolic and full of associations, because it was the colour of the Red Flag. I don't believe for a moment that Augustus found the Red Flag getting on his nerves after he had seen it forty or fifty times, which is his account of the matter. It was the very first time that he saw the Red Flag that he felt like charging it with lowered head. Most likely if he had seen it several thousand times in fairly quick succession, he wouldn't even have known it was there. And perhaps it was rather a pity that he didn't see more of it. I am not sure but that a steady course of Red Flaggery might have gradually mellowed his views. If you want to get people used to an idea, it is a thoroughly sound method of approach to begin by getting them used to the symbol that stands for it. At any rate that is a pretty common opinion. The Egyptians thought they could get people used to the idea of death by carting a corpse about at feasts, using mortality

The Red Room

as a sort of inverted appetiser. And there is a story of some Australian Government or other which issued a new postage-stamp, bearing a kangaroo or the like on it instead of the King's head, upon which the Opposition became very angry, saying that this alteration would assuredly undermine people's loyalty to the Throne, and encourage republican sentiment. And upon coming into power shortly afterwards, they broke the new dies at considerable cost and put the King's head back again, just to show that they meant it. They were probably quite right; no doubt upon occasion such symbols do affect people's minds in that strange way. There is at least one very famous case on record where a monarch's right to collect taxation was plainly deduced from the fact that he had placed his image and superscription upon the coinage. One hardly suspects at first how often deep policy is mingled with the marks of Caesar's pride.

But of all such symbols the banner is the most potent by far. The absurd attachment of nations and other masses of men to a flag, a bit of coloured bunting, is one of the most obstinate realities in all history, and one of the most moving. And the Red Flag too has its history, its moving record of glories and tragedies. It has its roll of martyrs in many times and countries, from Siberia to Chicago, from Peterloo to Bloody Sunday, and every Russian child in these days has heard their names and listened to their story. And now at last the deep red glow of struggle and suffering has become for all these people the steady light of victory, the triumphant standard of an onward march. Whether we like it or not, it is in that spirit that Russia lives, and it is not strange if, as Augustus says, there is something of religious fervour in their attachment to the flag that symbolises that sorely tried and now victorious cause, and to the heroic images of their almost legendary leaders.

This Russian Business

A certain famous novelist, who visited Russia some ten or twelve years ago, was troubled in spirit by the everlasting portrait of Karl Marx which faced him on every wall. No doubt he has learnt before now, not without decorous joy, that the image of Marx has gone back to second place. In the first days of 1924 Russia was just beginning to see daylight again after the terrible years of prostration that began with the Civil War and the famine. It was then, with the goal in sight, that Lenin died, worn out by overwork and anxiety, and with a constitution shattered by the after effects of the assassin's bullet. It is not surprising that it was *his* image which filled the minds of those that were left behind, and that his portrait began to assume the place of honour on the wall. That place it still retains, and seems likely to retain. The portrait of Marx is still somewhere about, but it is always slightly in the background. And this is clearly more than a mere formal or official loss of primacy; it represents a real intrusion and eclipse, an actual change of proportions in the popular hero-worship. Marx is still the inspired legislator, and his works a kind of Bible, from which texts are produced to refute an opponent's arguments. But now there is a new testament, which is the writings of Lenin. The faithful will by no means admit that one of these can ever contradict the other, and the mere suggestion savours a little of an idle and factious mind. But if such a contradiction could at all be conceived, one has the feeling that it is the hairier prophet and the more ancient law whose authority would be shaken.

And as to their personal memories, there is no sort of comparison, for if Marx is still the legislator and the prophet, his fame is dimmed and made a little legendary not only by the mere lapse of time, but also by the fact that he, like Moses, never actually entered the promised

The Red Room

land, but lived all his life in the house of bondage and died in a kind of spiritual exile, before the striking of that supreme hour towards which all his preaching pointed. Lenin's image and memory has now for these Russians a far more human appeal, and the more so because there is deep pathos mingled with his glory. They cannot forget that it was he who led them to their world-shaking victory; that he laboured with them afterwards in an evil day, and that he died for their sakes: merits not small even in that tortured country, where to harbour a generous enthusiasm meant playing with exile and death, and where thousands on thousands played with steady eyes against those tremendous stakes.

In sheer personal self-sacrifice Lenin shared an equal honour with nameless thousands, but the real prestige of his leadership, the rare genius that combined the thinker and the Titan, was thrown into greater relief even by accidental circumstances. He gave that push to the Revolution without which it never could have been, and he disappeared from the scene at a moment when it was flooded with that intense light that illuminates only the cardinal turnings of history. It was the dawning of a new age; the very course of events set the scene for an apotheosis. In a sense, Lenin appears as the protagonist of two epochs of revolutionary Russia; he personifies and sums up that long and most moving epic. He emerges from its slow and desperate past, and stands for a short moment at its sudden tremendous climax, a figure of storm and victory. Then comes darkness and sheer ruin; the Revolution is dying. By a last effort of insight, a last spurt of resolute action, he saves it from the depths; and then he dies.

Right or wrong, he holds a unique place in the hearts and imaginations of the Russian people; to them he wears the triple crown of the hero, the martyr, and the father

This Russian Business

of his country. And it is not easy to imagine that anything will ever shake that legend, unless all Russia goes down in ruin. No doubt the picture is strange, even grotesque, to those who live in a different faith, the faith which was defeated when he was victorious, and which despises and rejects the works in which he laboured. But that is scarcely to the point. To put it at the lowest, the Russians are entitled to their own legend. As to its objective truth, neither they nor we are in a position for critical and impartial judgment; both we and our children are far too contemporary; it will be time enough in a hundred years.

II

Enter the Five Years Plan

POLITICAL ECONOMISTS and practical men do not often agree, but one maxim at least is common to both of them, namely that the average man works much better when he is working for himself. Now in our modern societies this particular incentive to labour is one which by its nature cannot affect the great majority of men. At least seven-tenths of the population, in an industrialised Capitalist society, must always work for wages for somebody else. And most employers secretly (or even openly) believe that as a rule they do a shade less than their best. Now in a Socialist society this situation is, in theory at least, fundamentally altered. The workman is a part-owner, a profit-sharer, a joint sufferer from any losses which are sustained. And according to the same theory, if he realises that this is the true position (or alternatively, if he can be persuaded that it is the true position, even though in fact it is not) it should follow that he will feel he is working for himself, and other things being equal his interest in and enthusiasm for his work should be greatly increased.

It is a significant thing, as far as it goes, that for the time being, at least, the Russian worker does seem to feel a good deal like that. I say "for the time being," because of course it is suggested by opponents of the system that this state of mind is political rather than economic, that it is, in part, artificially produced, and that it cannot be regarded as a permanent element of the Communist system. Be that as it may, the practical effect in the meanwhile is clearly very considerable. It is a fact of no small value that the individual worker should take, as he admittedly does,

This Russian Business

an extremely keen interest in the progress of his industry and the production figures of his factory. An intense and unrelenting propaganda drives into him (even if he hadn't it before) the idea of his own responsibilities in "the struggle for reconstruction." He thinks of himself, he cannot help thinking of himself, as a cog in the wheel, a part of a huge machine. And the reconstruction of Russia is the theme of all talk, the centre of thought, the object of all faith. Round that everything revolves, from that everything starts, and to that everything at last returns. And that reconstruction is always envisaged as a struggle, a contest, a far-flung battle, in which you take part with your comrades, not for your pay, not for your rations or your petty pleasures at the canteen, but for victory. In your factory, in your mine, at the plough, in the ship's engine-room, you are in a sense a soldier fighting in a sacred cause; and the horizon is dark with fate and bright with to-morrow's dawn; it is not yet time to lay down your arms and think of your private affairs. Not that everyone at all times embraces and maintains that strained enthusiasm. That is neither credible nor needful. It is enough that there should be sufficient to leaven the mass, and this does seem to be true. And what is more, whenever the private soldier takes his mind from the struggle and thinks of cakes and ale, the influence of the doctrine is still all-powerful; it is to the ultimate victory that he looks for these things. If the cause goes down, he is persuaded that he will never have them at all. And of course he is obviously right, as far as that goes. Capitalism may be the only practicable doctrine, but no one will pretend that it is a very cheerful one, as far as the labouring masses are concerned. No honest man suggests that Capitalism will fulfil the promises of Socialism. The whole case for Capitalism is that Socialism will not fulfil them either, and that even if we are knee-deep in the

Enter the Five Years Plan

mud as it is, we had better stay where we are, or we shall be in it up to our necks.

But what *is* this hoped-for victory towards which all hearts in Russia beat? and just what are the conditions of the struggle through which victory is to come? The orthodox answer to those questions is contained in the volumes of Marxist doctrine; but in these days and in Russia there is a more concrete and immediate answer; it is an answer that serves for most questions, and it is contained in three words: the Five Years Plan. It is only when one listens to Russians that one realises how much the Plan is a living force, I had almost said a living being. Of course everybody knows something about the Plan from books, and even from common report and the tittle-tattle of newspapers. But what has obviously chiefly impressed the minds of most visitors to Russia, and of those who come into contact with Russians, is the extent to which the Plan has become the single unifying force of all everyday life, the goal of all effort and the centre of all hopes, the passion, the obsession, almost the religion of the rank and file of Russia, and especially of the younger generation. There is in all men a certain reserve of energy, a certain capacity for fervour and devotion, certain possibilities of effort, of creative will, of tenacious persistence. In Western countries and in our days these energies are partly scattered and chaotic; they answer in different men (and even in the same man) to different stimuli, and they discharge themselves in many different directions and flow along confused and even contrary channels. But in Soviet Russia and in these present years all those energies have become extraordinarily collected and concentrated. The passion of religious faith, the ardour of the patriot, the fire of the creative artist, the enthusiasm of youth, the weather-beaten tenacity of experienced men, all these have been

This Russian Business

appropriated, transmuted, turned into one central channel and harnessed to one overmastering purpose, the achievement of the Five Years Plan. To the younger people especially, the Plan is for the time being the be-all and end-all; it fills the whole horizon; it occupies all the present and colours all hopes of the future; it is the crown of labour and the promise of victory, the staff with which to walk, the far-off castle on the hill. They always speak of it in terms of studied matter-of-factness, but one always feels that there is something more; there is always a latent emotion, a suppressed fire. The Plan has not only captured their thinking faculties, but, what is far more important, it has possessed itself of their deepest emotions and their farthest-reaching aspirations. There is an element of deep truth in the mocking jest of a visiting journalist, that to the present generation of Russia at this moment the Five Years Plan is God. But apart from picturesque exaggerations of that kind, one cannot doubt that the Russian acceptance of the Plan, the Russian devotion to the Revolution which gave it birth, rank among the five or six great enthusiasms of all history. There were the Crusades, the Renaissance and the discovery of the New World, the Reformation, the French Revolution, and so on. But none of these movements was on quite so vast a scale or touched everyday existence at so many different points, none of them appealed to so many different motives, or promised so vast a transformation of ordinary human lives. Certainly, the French Revolution promised liberty, equality, and fraternity. But the Bastille was scarcely taken before it began to be clear that there was a certain misunderstanding as to what these fine words meant; and by the time Napoleon was ready to appropriate the inheritance of the Bourbons and put the Revolution in his pocket, the French people were sufficiently disillusioned to let him do it. But in

Enter the Five Years Plan

Russia, in spite of everything, there is no such disillusionment. The tide is still at flood; the enthusiasm shows no signs of waning; the climax is not yet reached. There is plenty of violent disagreement; there are even heresy hunts, excommunications, outlawings and exiles. But there is still no doubt as to the end to be sought; the people know what they mean by their war-cries, and they mean to win, if Fate at all allows. Nor is there any real trace or serious fear of Caesarism. Whatever men hold against the Government, it is believed to be honest; if it means to betray the people, there is at least no sign yet. Therefore this fervour still holds; the revolutionary spirit burns with a steady flame; the people are still confident that the future is in their hands.

And if the Five Years Plan has successfully harnessed all this energy for its own purposes, this is because the Plan has imposed itself as the logical outcome, the cardinal point, the culminating struggle of the Revolution. It is to industrialise Russia, to make a wealthy country out of a poor one, and thereby to make enormous improvements in wages, food, housing, conditions generally—in one word, to raise the peasants and the proletariat to a level of civilised welfare undreamed of before. But this is not all, and not the greatest thing. What gives the Plan its final chrism, and makes the effort for its achievement a kind of holy war, is that it is designed to make Russia self-contained, an independent country instead of a dependent one, to give the workers' republic at last some kind of security against the ceaseless fear of intervention by the hostile Capitalist states, of combined economic pressure, of open or secret war. Hence too all this feverish haste, this continual quickening of the tempo of the plan, this anxiety to forestall the appointed time. For no Russian knows when intervention may come. The hostile states are divided: perhaps to-morrow they will be united. They

This Russian Business

are irresolute, to-morrow some chance may galvanise them to sudden action. Their populations are restive: will the attack come as soon as they are quiescent? or if domestic troubles become more dangerous, will they make a diversion at our expense? And perhaps it will not be war, but economic boycott. If they refused to-morrow to sell us machinery, to allow their technicians to work in our industries and train our workers, can we carry on without them yet? have we factories enough already? have we enough experience? if the worst happens, how soon could we manage at a pinch? will it be six months hence? will it be a year?

They all talk like that; there is no reasonable doubt that they feel like that. To the Western spectator the fear of war may seem fantastic. The last war was fantastic enough in its origins, but would not Europe have done better to be more afraid of it before it happened? And as to the economic boycott, that is obviously a very real danger to the Soviet States. America and Canada have already set up some piece-meal prohibitions, and there is an active party in England, there are active parties everywhere, bringing pressure on their Governments to cut off all economic relations with these unclean countries. Nor are these agitators idle fanatics; on the contrary, there is surely some ground for looking on them as the only realists on their own side of the fence. There is no doubt that if the Socialist order succeeds in Russia, the Capitalist order elsewhere will be immediately imperilled. And the obvious way (if it be not already too late) of preventing the success of the Russian experiment is to shut down on supplies, especially supplies of machinery and supplies of expert technicians, before Russia becomes self-supporting. But the real security of Russia lies in the fact that these realists are not likely to get their own way. At the moment, Russia

Enter the Five Years Plan

has a monopoly of enthusiasm. The masses (and even a good part of the classes) in Western countries are economic atheists. They are not likely to overturn the Capitalist order, for the present at any rate. But they will not willingly submit to any sacrifices in order to support it. They are inclined to cry, "A plague on both your houses!" They want peace and quiet above all things. They are not likely to get it. But they will not subsidise any disturbances if they can help it.

III

This Camaraderie

IT WAS ALL my fault. We had been for some days in Leningrad, and were to leave for Moscow on the evening train, at eight o'clock. I had spent most of the afternoon exploring the byways of the city, and at a quarter past seven I found myself in a crowded street a good way from my hotel, and my bag not even packed. The pavements were chock-full of people. It is a curious fact that when you are in a hurry nearly all the people in the street begin to move in the opposite direction from the one you want to take. And even those few who are going the same way walk much more slowly than usual. In spite of these distressing facts I did my best for the next quarter of an hour, but frequent references to my watch made it clear that time was moving much faster than I could. At last it dawned on me that the roadway, at least, was fairly clear, and I stepped off the kerb and began to dodge along between the traffic. Suddenly a voice from somewhere on the footpath came to me out of the evening gloom. "Tovarishch!" (comrade). And then again, "Tovarishch! Tovarishch!" Was the fellow hailing me, I wondered. Anyway, if he were, it must be a mistake. I knew no one in Leningrad who would hail me in Russian. Besides, it was too late to stop and investigate. I kept on. But suddenly a heavy hand was laid on my shoulder, and the greater part of the Russian language was shot off close to my ear. I turned round. It was a policeman (or rather a militiaman. You must not call them policemen. That is a Czarist term). He addressed me at some length. He talked very fast. If he had not been a little out of breath, I am sure he would have done even better. He also gesticulated. I

This Camaraderie

understood that rather more clearly. He did not seem to be talking to me all the time. Part of his discourse was evidently addressed to the large and appreciative crowd which had collected round us. I gathered at last that he was appealing to them, as well as to high Heaven and to me, to bear witness to the enormity of my offence. At that moment I was not at all clear what my offence was. But I knew it was enormous. I found out afterwards that pedestrians are forbidden to walk on the roadway under penalty of a fine of one rouble, to be collected then and there by the officer of the law. I jabbered back at him in several non-Slavic languages, but he answered me just as vehemently, and he gesticulated far better than I did. The only words I caught were three which frequently recurred. They were "Tovarishch," "rouble," and "straf." They seemed to come in every hundred words or so, like a refrain, and he had a nasty way of holding out his hand as if he expected me to put something into it. I knew very well what he meant, but I kept on jabbering, to the delight of the still gathering crowd, while I did some rapid thinking. If I kept on being obtuse I should probably be arrested and taken to a Soviet watch-house, which would be worth while. Besides, it would probably, after two hours' talk, save me a rouble. On the other hand, I should most certainly miss that train, which would not only cost me many roubles, but also upset all my arrangements. I regretfully decided to cut my losses, and I gave him a rouble. He wrote me a receipt, which I still treasure, and after the crowd and I had exchanged a few farewell giggles, I rushed away (on the pavement, for the most part) and caught that train by a hair's breadth.

Of course I had to explain why I was late. Augustus was unusually sympathetic. But it was the word "Comrade!" that worried him most. He sympathised with me because the policeman had fraternised with me, while he fleeced

This Russian Business

me. He thought it was adding insult to injury. I tried to explain that I was not particular what policemen called me. I did not remember my gorge rising when I heard the word "Comrade" from a bobby's lips. My objections to the proceedings were of a far more sordid kind. It was when he mentioned roubles that I thought his remarks were out of place. But Augustus had thought of something else. "They all do it!" he said. "You may pretend you are amused, but it's not only policemen and petty criminals." ("Thank you," I murmured, "thank you kindly.") But Augustus went on: "I remember now hearing on the ship that the sailors use the word to their officers. In fact I heard one of them doing it. 'Tovarishch Kapitan,' he said. 'Comrade Captain!' What do you think of that?" "It all depends!" I said with some feeling. "If the sailor was just being amiable, I don't see anything against it. What was he talking to the captain about? Did he touch him for a rouble? That's the point!" "Don't be an ass!" said Augustus. "The point is that you must have discipline, and to have that you must have the ordinary exterior marks of respect. . . ." And he explained carefully how familiarity breeds contempt, and all that.

I don't know. No doubt the word "comrade" is a little overworked in Russia just now. As Augustus says, it is not only policemen and malefactors. The word has become the almost universal form of address. If you ask a stranger the way, you address him as "comrade." In a shop you are addressed as "comrade." Stalin and his bootblack call each other "comrade." The former terms of address equivalent to "Sir," and "Madam" and "Mister," and so on, have totally disappeared from current speech. You may call a stranger "Grazhdanin" (Citizen) instead of Comrade, but I don't think that would please Augustus any better. Of course the latter term was used long ago in the French

This Camaraderie

Revolution. They used it everywhere, even in the armies, where discipline is supposed to be especially necessary. And apparently nothing very disastrous happened. Bonaparte seems to have been able to win battles, even when his soldiers were still addressing him as "Citizen General." And no doubt ships can be navigated more or less successfully under the same kind of handicap. As a matter of fact, any word that is used as a mere formula is likely to have its original meaning worn pretty thin. Convention for convention. I don't know that it is any more absurd for a ship's carpenter to address the commander as "comrade captain" than for an English captain to address his subordinate officer as "sir," which he does upon occasion, or for the Pope to describe himself as the slave of God's slaves, or for Rockefeller or Rothschild or the Prime Minister of England to write a letter to a junior clerk or a village postmaster and sign it, "Yours obediently." If there is really a comradely spirit between officers and crew, one may suppose that the work will go forward all the better for that. If there is no such thing, then that form of address is simply meaningless, and may therefore take its place alongside nearly all the other existing forms of address.

IV

Class Distinctions

PEOPLE SOMETIMES get the idea that Augustus is a confirmed eater of Bolsheviks, but that is scarcely true. He has his anti-Communist moods and his pro-Communist moods. I suppose most people have. I mean ordinary people who are not obliged to take some sort of official view of the matter, and stick to it. No one expects a publicist or a politician to have moods. He can't afford himself luxuries. He has to be right all the time. Even if he does change, he can't do it all at once. If he turns his coat, he still has to wear his trousers the same way out until people have got used to it. But with ordinary people it depends on the weather, on how they feel, on the last bit of news they have read in the morning's paper, and sometimes even on the degree of personal antipathy they feel towards the man who tries to ram down their throats what in other circumstances may be their favourite doctrine. I know we all changed our minds a good many times during that trip, although of course we didn't always admit it to each other, any more than great men do. You can't change your mind in public, with any decency, any more than you can change your clothes. Not without ceremony, that is. The advantage of not being a great man is that you are not always in public. You can sort your impressions out a bit in strict privacy, and then come back to the company and show off your new suit. But it's a troublesome business. Still, we all did have a good many tackings and zigzaggings. Only the trouble about Augustus was that he had not two different attitudes, but three. He did the usual zigzags from right to left, and then sometimes he

Class Distinctions

would execute a sudden disconcerting movement from top to bottom, in a kind of mental third dimension. He sometimes praised Russian Socialist arrangements. Sometimes he denounced them. But at times he attacked the Bolsheviks, with a kind of moral fervour, because their arrangements were not Socialist at all, because their pretended new order was just the same old order swaggering about in fancy dress clothes. More than once I felt sure that he was right, but it seemed to me that the appropriate emotions were grief, if one were a Socialist, and mirth, if one were not. Augustus insisted on treating it as a matter for holy wrath. He reserved his grief for the occasions when he felt compelled to praise the deeds of the Bolsheviks, and my impression is that he considered mirth on these subjects to be rather unseemly.

It began with the steamer tickets. They were printed in Russian, but we made out that they were second-class tickets. Augustus pointed out that this was all wrong. How could one have different classes amongst passengers on a Communist ship? Surely equality was the first dogma of all revolutionists. But here there were evidently first, second, and third classes—an aristocracy, a bourgeoisie, and a proletariat, in the very stronghold of this allegedly classless society. The whole thing was obviously a fake. Equality broke down the moment it came into contact with practical life. . . . I tried to console him by suggesting that if there were only one class the accommodation would probably be all of it very uncomfortable, as it was on most one-class ships. Augustus agreed with this, but he insisted that even if he were more comfortable as it was, that did not alter the fact that the Bolsheviks were renegades to their own principles in arranging things that way. He made it clear that his personal gratitude was mingled with a public-spirited indignation. He continued to be

This Russian Business

indignant about it at intervals all through the voyage, whenever anything reminded him of that topic, and in Russia itself his wrath became chronic, for there we found that there were different classes in trains, too, and more and less expensive categories of hotels, and better or worse seats in the theatres, at different prices. . . . It certainly did seem rather disappointing, to say the least of it. We had rather expected some show of equality in these things. We wanted to know just how it was done, in what ways it worked out, and we were rather curious about that. We were not sure whether the consequences would be edifying or absurd, but we did expect to see some consequences. Well, the thing simply wasn't there to be looked at. It was like going to see a well-advertised circus, all agog to know if the performers could really do the acts we had seen on the posters, and then finding that the most exciting turns had been cut out of the programme. We rather felt that we wanted our money back.

When we got on board our fears were confirmed. There were, in fact, three classes. Certainly the third-class accommodation was better than on most ships. There was not the same differences in the cabins. But still there were three classes. It was just an ordinary ship. Somebody suggested hopefully that perhaps it was only a temporary arrangement. The Bolsheviks must be kept rather busy changing everything from top to bottom, and perhaps they hadn't got round to ships yet. This sounded plausible enough during the voyage, but it lost a good deal of its force when we came to trains and theatres, and so on. Augustus rejected the explanation from the first, but he reminded us that the *Jan Rudzutak* was partly a tourist ship, and no doubt had to cater for foreign tastes. It might be that this snobbish differentiation into classes was a concession to the barbarian West, something thrown in as a bait for the bourgeoisie,

Class Distinctions

so that they should more readily visit Russia and there spend their coveted foreign currency.

However, after we had been a little time on board, we began to realise that it was not quite an ordinary ship, after all. For although the sleeping and eating accommodation was separate, everything else was shared by the three classes in common. All the deck space was free to everybody, except of course the sacred spaces of the bridge. There was a smoking saloon and a drawing-room, both very comfortable, situated amidships near the first-class cabins. These rooms were free to the third class, and were actually used by them as much as by the first or second. All the passengers mixed freely—amusements, games, the endless talk that goes on aboard ship, everything went on without the slightest suggestion of snobbishness or constraint. And of course I have already mentioned the evening music and the dancing.

There it was. The ship was hybrid. There were class distinctions and there were not. In comparison with an English ship, equality had made a certain headway, even a good deal of headway. But it had stopped half-way. You could still buy with money a preferential treatment, an advantage over your fellow-passengers, though not in all things. It was evidently true that the Bolsheviks had not got round to ships yet, whatever they might have done in other directions. At any rate, they had not yet been equal to the task of devising an equalitarian solution of the food and lodging question. Either they had not had sufficient imagination to work out the details, or else in these, almost the first ships built in Soviet yards, they had slavishly copied the plans of other ships, with separate cabin accommodation and separate dining saloons. And then they had maintained the same old difference in fares. Of course it was clear enough that under any conceivable rearrangement of

This Russian Business

accommodation some berths in a ship would still be better than others. I should hate to have a cabin in the bowels of the ship without a porthole, or one above the propeller, or even right forward, where in bad weather the bows climb giddily to somewhere near the stars, hang poised there for a breathless instant, and then, with a sickening rush, smash down again on the seas. I shouldn't be in the least consoled if they told me that the other cabins were the same class and the same price. In fact, I should be all the more annoyed to think that I was not even saving money. But then, of course, I am a bad sailor. Still, the difference is there, even if my excitable innards make it seem more important than it really is. Rich men never take third-class cabins, even when their bowels are of brass. And then as to dining-rooms, if you turned a talented and imaginative Communist ship designer loose and told him to produce a single large dining saloon for all the passengers, or several saloons all equally airy and equally desirable in other ways, I don't know how far the limitations of ships would allow him to succeed. But I should think a good deal could be done. In most ships the third-class dining-room is a decidedly uncomfortable place. There again, nothing could ever make all the accommodation exactly equal. If there were only one dining saloon on the ship, I should still prefer the seat nearest the door.

I asked Augustus how he thought these inequalities came to be preserved; was it that the Bolshevik designers did not really want equality, but only pretended that they did? Augustus would not go as far as that. He said you could never tell what a Bolshevik really wanted. You might as well question the secret motives of a thunderstorm. But the point was that the thing was impossible. It simply could not be done. When these theorists come up against Hard Facts. . . . He concluded (some little time afterwards)

Class Distinctions

by saying that he didn't blame the Bolsheviks for not accomplishing the impossible. He blamed them for pretending that they had accomplished it.

But I think Augustus was too lenient. I *am* rather inclined to blame the Bolsheviks. It seems to me that they might have had a shot at working out their ideas, at any rate. Obviously a good deal could be done if competent persons really set their minds to it. It was a technical problem, like any other technical problem. And I should have liked to see what sort of fist they would make of it. I could only hope that they would see the error of their ways later on. When they have finished with Five Years Plans and collective farms and such things, and are looking about them for more worlds to conquer, perhaps they will at last get round to this little job, which has hitherto been somewhat scamped. And then, but not till then, I shall know whether those Hard Facts that Augustus talks of are really as hard as he makes out.

V

Immigrants

IT TOOK US some little time to find out what kind of people had shipped in each of the three classes, chiefly because you could not tell what class a man was in until you actually saw him going into his quarters, or until he told you. The first class were easily identified; there were only four or five of them. They were all either foreign specialists or women tourists. Most of the second class were also either tourists, or foreign specialists or technicians coming to Russia on contract, or returning there after leave. There were also several wives of such technicians, who had been holidaying in Germany or Austria, and were now rejoining their husbands in Leningrad or Moscow. There were not more than two or three Russians, and these were women who had long lived abroad, and were now coming home to stay with relatives. Most of the Russians (they were the smallest part of the passengers) went third class. In fact one had on the whole the impression that if one were a Russian, it was not quite the thing to travel first or second; it had a kind of bourgeois flavour about it. It was a weakness pardonable enough in outlanders.

The third class was pretty full, and (what seemed at first a little strange) they turned out to be almost all immigrants. Even the Russians were mostly people who had lived long years abroad, emigrants of pre-war days coming back at last, often with English-speaking wives and families. Somehow, one had never thought of Russia as a country into which a tide of immigration flowed, and the strangeness of the phenomenon was increased when one found that a very large proportion of the immigrants were from the

Immigrants

New World. One generally thinks of emigration as flowing (or in these days trickling) from Europe to America, and not vice versa. And Russia in particular—Russia was one of the classic sources of emigration, a prolific and poverty-stricken race, a huge reservoir of lean peasant-kind, sad-eyed and hard-bested, who overflowed (when the Czars had no wars at hand) and went seeking for lands where bread was not so bitter as at home. Then of course one knew that besides that tide of the poor who crossed the Atlantic to make their fortunes there had been in these revolutionary years another tide, this time of political emigration, which had filled all the cities of Europe with tens of thousands of the dispossessed, the proscribed or the discontented, the adventurers who had picked the wrong side, the remnants of the armies of Denikin and Wrangel, the hosts of political irreconcilables and disgruntled bourgeois intellectuals, all the wreckage of the old order from Grand Dukes to footmen and petty traders, all those who had been torn from their anchorages, had lost their niche in the older frame of things, and either could not or would not fit into the new.

And now there was this tide flowing back. It does not flow in enormous numbers yet, but there is a steady and unmistakable flow. Every ship takes its contingent. And upon analysis, the composition of that current turns out to be rather curious. It falls mostly into two classes. The first are political immigrants belonging, of course, to the opposite party from the Czarist or bourgeois emigrants already mentioned. For the most part they are not Russians, and have never seen Russia before. They are convinced Communists, youthful enthusiasts or veterans of decades of labour struggles in England, Germany, or America, who have now deliberately turned their backs on the countries of their birth and breeding to make their homes on a soil and in a social atmosphere more congenial to their ingrained ideas.

This Russian Business

They sometimes speak a little wistfully, these elder men, and there are times when one catches an almost pathetic note in their talk. It is only now and then, and the most part of them betray no such weakness. They are full of confidence and good cheer; they feel, or profess to feel, that they are going with undiminished courage to a scene where their strength will be more profitable to the common cause. They will help to build the workers' state in Russia, simply because that is the most urgent job, because upon the success of that building depends the future of Socialism in the lands they have left behind. But there are one or two who are oppressed at times by the feeling that they are deserting their posts. In a sense they are beaten men; they go with failure in their hands to reap where they have not digged. And yet it is a sort of homing instinct that draws them, these men and women who in their own countries have always been in a certain sense pariahs, living their lives on a note of struggle and protest, often persecuted, always at least subjected to a certain amount of ridicule, never feeling themselves quite on a normal footing, never quite at home with their native surroundings, always rather on the outskirts of the human herd. They have grown weary of exile and defeat; they look forward now to a more fruitful labour, to marching securely under their own banner, and sowing in a soil where they will see the harvest before they die. Often enough they have had pretty stormy lives; they count themselves lucky that they can turn before the evening and make the port on an incoming tide. These are all well over forty. Then there are the youngsters in their twenties or in their teens. None of them have any doubts or misgivings at all. They have heard that the world is being conquered, and they only hope it won't be all over before they get there.

These are the political immigrants. One realised readily

Immigrants

enough that a certain amount of *that* sort of immigration was natural and inevitable, from the moment when any success at all appeared to wait upon the Russian adventure. But it was the second class of immigrants that rather upset one's preconceived ideas, those who were going to Russia purely for economic reasons. These formed the greater part of the ship's company. They were men (not women, except in the case of married couples) who were simply out of a job in Europe or America, and who were going to Russia because they had heard that there were jobs going there, and that the wages and conditions were good. They were all skilled workers; they told us that according to their information only those were wanted. Some had contracts made in advance; these were the most part. A few were going just on the off-chance.

One of these, a young fellow of twenty-five or six, had left America, not because he despaired of finding a job there, (he had only been unemployed for six or seven weeks), but because Russia rather appealed to the adventurous spirit in him, and also because of a certain leaning towards Communist doctrine. He was almost the only one who did not seem to fall quite distinctly into either of the classes mentioned. His motives were mixed, and I think the chief ingredient in the mixture was the feeling that it was all rather a lark. One does feel that way at twenty-five. He had very little money in his pocket, but there was plenty of go in him, and a fund of cheerful irreverence towards persons and doctrines which I fear will always keep him on the outer fringes of orthodoxy, at the best. He explained with a twinkle in his eye that he meant to call on Joe as soon as he got to Moscow, and point out to him what a golden chance the Soviet Government would be missing if it failed to offer him a job. When somebody asked who Joe might be, he explained airily that he meant Joseph Stalin,

This Russian Business

and that if he had never actually called Stalin "Joe" to his face, that was partly because he had never met him. I ran into him a week or two later just outside the Red Square in Moscow, and he told me he had a job in a local tool-factory, and was to start the following Monday. He said he hadn't seen Joe yet, having been rather busy with sight-seeing, but that he would bear him in mind: it wouldn't hurt Joe to be kept waiting a little. I feel that there is a future in store for that young man. Whether it is a pleasant one or not will probably depend on whether the Slavs have a sense of humour or not. I consulted Augustus on that point, and he told me that Russians were generally supposed to be rather deficient in that quality, but that there was said to be a new psychology since the Revolution, and humour might turn out to be one of its components. I hope so, but I have my doubts.

Most of these people came from America. Some were American-born, others were immigrants from half the countries of Europe, who after various ups and downs had found, rather to their surprise, that they were down for good, and had come to the pretty definite conclusion that the Golden West was only golden in parts, and those the parts which they could not reach. They were full of stories of the huge wages they used to earn in the boom years, especially in 1929, which was to them the Wonderful Year, the peak point of all their recollections, the never-to-be-forgotten date which in itself summed up a vanished epoch. After 1929, the deluge, the endless morass of unemployment. They told stories of that too. Most of them did not seem to think it would ever end; all of them were sure the good old times, the marvellous nine-dollar-a-day times, never could come back. The men who still had jobs were not making the half, sometimes not the quarter, of what they used to get. What with low wages and broken time,

Immigrants

it was easy enough to be in work and to be half-starved. Even if things got better, the States would only be like England, or France, or Germany. America, the legendary America of the European immigrant, was a country whose history came to an end in 1929.

Some of them had signed contracts for twelve months, some for two years. The wages were attractive, though they seldom compared with the fabulous earnings of highly skilled workers in the fat years across the Atlantic. Still, as one of these men told me, it wasn't only what you got, it was what you could buy for it. The cost of living in America was just as fabulous as the wages, and when your wages were cut, or you were put on quarter-time or lost your job, the price of bread and meat and clothes and rent stayed where it was before. Anyway, he was all right for two years now, and he hoped it would be permanent, though nothing was promised.

"Yes," said Augustus one night over our ritual noggin of vodka (how could one be on a Russian ship and drink anything but vodka?). "Yes, the poor fools are lured to Russia like moths to a candle flame. They think it is a working men's paradise. They're due for a rude awakening!" "What sort of awakening?" asked the School Teacher. "The sort of awakening you have in the morning after a night out!" said Augustus conclusively, if a little vaguely. "Yes, I know," said the School Teacher, with just the faintest trace of impatience in her voice, "but this man K——, for example, the motor mechanic man, the one from Detroit. He says he's got a written contract for a job for twelve months at three hundred and fifty roubles a month. Do you mean that they won't really give him as much as three hundred and fifty roubles, in spite of the contract?" Augustus said no, he thought they might probably give him the proper number of roubles, but that

This Russian Business

wasn't everything. I cut in here with what I thought was a helpful suggestion. "Perhaps he will find," I said, "that the cost of living is extremely high." Augustus said it probably was, but he added rather mysteriously that he thought that wouldn't be the main thing. "Well, but then," said the School Teacher, almost plaintively, "what *is* the main thing? What *do* you think is wrong about it?" Augustus roused himself. "A written contract sounds all very fine and large," he said. "You can't always say beforehand just what is fishy about it, even if you've seen the contract, which we haven't. But there is sure to be a catch somewhere. These fellows have no idea what they're up against. They don't know what conditions in Russia are really like. They only know what they are told!" The School Teacher seemed to be still unsatisfied, and I left her struggling with Augustus for more light.

I found afterwards that the statement that there must be a catch in it somewhere was a fixed principle with Augustus where Russia was concerned, almost an article of faith. He spent a good deal of his time in Russia trying to find out where the catch was, and to that end, or mostly to that end, he carried on many conversations with a motley assortment of informants. Sometimes he was satisfied with his discoveries. More often his rather aggressive methods failed to draw any really adequate admissions from the Russian he happened to be cross-examining, but I have heard him explain this by the fact that of course none of these people were *allowed* to tell the truth about things.

But to return to the immigrants; it seemed to me that they had, or ought to have had, a fairly good idea of what conditions in Russia were like, for a good many of them had been in correspondence with friends or relatives who had already gone to Russia for the same purpose. In the case of the man from Detroit, he had had letters from a

Immigrants

cousin who had been working in Nijni Novgorod for eight months, and had strongly urged him to come over. I brought this fact to the notice of Augustus, but he told me that the letters were probably opened by the censor before they left the Novgorod post office, and no one would be fool enough to write anything criticising local conditions, which would be sure to lose him his job, at the very least. As I have never been in Nijni Novgorod, I could not refute this statement off-hand. I felt that I ought to have been able to make some use of the fact that Augustus had never been there either, but somehow I missed the opportunity. It also seemed to me, on thinking it over, that a job which one is fearful of losing must have at least something to recommend it; it cannot be an unspeakably bad job, at any rate. But I shall never know what Augustus would have said to that. If only I had thought of it at the time! But that was always the tragedy of my discussions with Augustus. I could never think of the obvious answer until it was too late. And there is only one chance. You can't do it next day. It isn't sporting to set out in cold blood and work a man up to say again the thing he said yesterday just in order to shoot off a sham extempore retort that you worked out the night before when you ought to have been asleep. You must load and fire while the bird is on the wing or else lose your shot. But I broke this rule, at least in spirit, by dragging the subject in again by the heels half an hour later and asking Augustus whether he had any positive reason to believe that a censorship of the post existed at Nijni Novgorod, or indeed anywhere else. He said, no, not exactly, that is, he had no actual information, but there were *reasons* enough, if you came to that. For instance, to go no further than these same immigrants, the very fact that they were nearly all in correspondence with Russia and none of them seemed to have heard anything

This Russian Business

very unfavourable, as far as we knew, was pretty clear evidence that there must be a censorship, and a fairly strict one. After that answer I retired baffled, and left Augustus with the honours. Upon thinking it over, it still appears to me to be an admirable retort. Even now I can only think of one suitable reply, and that one would have to be made with a brick.

VI

Rubbing Shoulders

WE CAME UP the Gulf of Finland at dark of night, with a cold wind blowing, and flurries of rain, but the squalls passed over, and as midnight came on, clear and calm, we saw the lights of Kronstadt on the sea, and then those of Leningrad opening out behind, growing and growing till they filled half the horizon. We passed into the Neva through a tumult of noise and illumination, sirens screaming, tugs bustling about, searchlights playing on us from forts and warships anchored in the roadstead, small craft and motor-boats buzzing about like a swarm of angry bees. It seemed like a town of war, as if time had gone back fifteen years. Of course it was not all meant for us. We found out afterwards that there had been some kind of review of the fleet. This sudden energetic vision of forts and ships of war out of the darkness gave us our first impression of Russia as a material force, a great power in the warlike sense, something to be counted with in the world of hard knocks, as well as in the world of ideas.

They told us to be ready to disembark at half-past seven in the morning. Augustus said we need not take this too literally, as nobody in Russia had the slightest idea of the value of time. I think he is partly right, but on this particular occasion I trusted him too far, and it cost me my breakfast. We left the ship punctually. But the examination of passports and baggage lasted for hours. However, when it came at last to our turn, we found that they did not bother much about tourists; the examination was decidedly cursory. Then we went to the money-changing counter. We had been told not to change more money than

This Russian Business

we absolutely needed, as they gave you very few roubles for a pound when you went into the country, and took a great many roubles for a pound on your departure, when you wanted to change the Russian money you had left over. But this is pure fable, as we discovered afterwards. Our pounds were changed into roubles at the standard rate of something under ten roubles to the gold pound, and our remaining roubles were afterwards changed back into pounds at exactly the same rate.

Leningrad has at first glance rather the look of a city built in a hurry, as indeed it was. Peter the Great and his successors made large provision of palaces and public buildings, with ample squares opening in front of them, which are adorned with statues of the Czars in conspicuous positions. The Revolution has left these standing, in spite of its passion for political propaganda, or perhaps because of it. But the ordinary buildings that line the ordinary streets have a decidedly haphazard look, rather like London at its worst. The Nevsky Prospect is now the Octobriskaia Prospect, after the October Revolution, the second uprising in 1917, which placed the Soviets in control. Many names of streets have been thus changed, somewhat after the French example, in order to commemorate the Revolution instead of the Czars and the old aristocracy. Every city has a Karl Marx Street in it, and a Square of the Revolution, often an Engelskaya Prospect. Lenin of course has a whole city to his name, in spite of Peter the Great; and now there is Stalingrad, too, and a few others of the new towns. Sverdlov, the first president of the Socialist Republic, who died in 1919, has one of the largest squares in Moscow for a memorial besides a Liberian city. But perhaps the month in which the Revolution took place furnishes the hardest-worked of the new names. There are October Prospects and October railway stations, October squares, boulevards,

Rubbing Shoulders

parks and institutes. Even one of the guilds of school children (a local form of boy-scoutery) is known as Octobryata, Children of October. By a somewhat analogous refashioning of language, the Revolution has given a new word to the Russian vocabulary, which is perhaps significant of the new outlook in Russian social life, for unfairness or unbecoming conduct is now sometimes stigmatised as being, not ungentlemanly, but unproletarian (*neproletarskoe*).

One's first impression of Leningrad is that of enormous crowds; and it is an impression that lasts. All the streets seem to be thronged with people all day long, and at the busiest hours it is difficult to walk on the pavements at all (I think I have already mentioned that it is rather expensive to walk anywhere else). All these crowds have at first sight a rather drab and uniform appearance. Augustus said they were depressing. What could be drearier than a town where everybody was dressed exactly the same as everybody else? It was true more or less; they were all dressed pretty much in the same style, and none of them were dressed very well, according to Bond Street standards. There were no top hats or frock coats or spats. And none of the women were at all elaborately dressed. Only one thing recalled the feminine crowds of London or Paris, and that was that many of the younger women were evidently dissatisfied with the faces they started life with, and had made such temporary improvements as their means or taste dictated. But perhaps the thing that gave the greatest impression of uniformity was the men's neckwear. We hardly saw such a thing as a stiff collar in all Russia, and we saw very few collars of any kind, except the kind which grow naturally out of the necks of soft shirts. In short, the whole lot of them were dressed more or less like working people. It was this that really depressed Augustus, as he afterwards admitted. He said if a classless society had that result, he was more against

This Russian Business

it than ever. But of course the crowds were to some extent a by-product of the "unbroken working week," the system (now partly abandoned) under which everybody worked for five days and then had a day off, and so on. This was done by shifts, and the industries thus worked without a break. Which meant that on any given day one-fifth of the working population was on holiday, doing its shopping or what not. And so the streets were always thronged, even in business hours.

But it is the trams which give the strongest impression of overcrowding; and there are reasons for that too. If you have cities (for Moscow is pretty much the same) where trams are the only means of transport worth talking about, where there are very few buses, no underground railways, and no private motor-cars at all, that has obviously two results. One is that there are always far too many people in the trams. Every tram, at all ordinary times, is literally jammed with people. Perhaps one-third of the passengers get a seat. For the rest there is not even standing room. However, it does not matter much, even if they fail to get their feet on the floor. Everybody is jammed so tight that it is quite easy to remain upright without any support at all from one's own feet.

That is one result of having only a single means of transport, and it is often an extremely uncomfortable result. But the Western bourgeois visitor quite evidently suffers (if he is subject to suffering of that kind) from another and even more serious discomfort, namely, that he is forced to rub shoulders (literally) with the working classes, that is, with people he never sees at home, except at a certain distance, and with whom he certainly never comes into this kind of direct physical contact except on rare occasions. From long use and habit even the fringes and lower strata of our middle class are accustomed to this highly artificial

Rubbing Shoulders

separation. In London the clerk and the counter-jumper go to and from their work at a different hour from the labouring classes; they get into their bus or tube at a different station, and they get out at a different station. They don't live in working-men's suburbs, or go to working-men's eating-houses. If they poke their heads inside a restaurant door and find the place full of people in their working clothes, they go somewhere else. They drink in bars where working men do not go, or else they go to the "private" or "saloon" side of the same bar and pay a penny or two-pence more for their drink. It is a remarkable phenomenon, when one comes to think of it, this neurotic shrinking of the English bourgeois from any sort of personal contact, let alone fellowship, with the working classes, and one cannot but wonder at the extent to which the middle classes, even the lower middle classes, have succeeded in building up an artificial watertight world of their own to live in—how they dwell in the midst of all this sea of the English people as a sort of people apart, a nation within a nation, almost as much strangers and foreigners as they would be in Paris or Berlin.

Well, here they can't do it, and that brings them up with a round turn. To begin with, in Russia practically the whole population belongs to the working classes. Of course there are categories of people—one dare not call them "classes"; that is a word one must be very careful about in Soviet Russia—there are categories, then, of people who perform hard manual labour, and other categories who work in shops and offices and so forth. The former are the "workers" *par excellence*, in the local Communist jargon, and are the most privileged classes. The clerks and typists and so on are distinguished, even in Russia, by the fact that they don't have to dirty their hands. But they are not distinguished, as in England, by the fact that they have a better coat on

This Russian Business

their backs and wear a collar and tie, nor yet by the fact that grocers and policemen will call them "Sir." Russian policemen don't call anybody "Sir." They address everybody, without distinction, as "Comrade," even when—— But enough of that. To return to our clerks and secretaries; they are in no respect socially superior to carpenters and bricklayers. If there is a difference, they are the inferior class. But when you pass them in the street or squeeze more intimately against them in the tram, they are absolutely indistinguishable from the "workers." Augustus says you can tell them because they wash more often, but when invited to pick some of them out by that test he failed miserably. He says further that if they all dress alike, it is not because the "worker" has a better coat than in the Western countries, but because the shop assistant has a worse one. Here I think Augustus is undoubtedly right. But he finds it a matter for gloom, and there we part company. If starched collars and black coats are really a measure of civilisation, then Russia at the moment is in a very backward state. One is reminded of the traditional English aristocrat in the tropics, who lives at his outpost of Empire on the edge of the jungle in the midst of naked savages, and sweats profusely all day long in a helmet and a cotton shirt, but who nevertheless insists on dressing for dinner every evening that God makes, boiled shirt and dinner-jacket and all, though the temperature may be a steady ninety-two in the shade, and the perspiration rolling visibly off his brow (and invisibly, but much more profusely, off every other part of him). He performs this uncomfortable ritual by way of preserving his self-respect, even though he may be the only white man for miles. And if he comes where there are enough Europeans for social life, he will dance in the same fantastic rig-out, bringing six or eight collars with him to a party. I tried to impress

Rubbing Shoulders

Augustus with these strange facts, but I found he had lived in the Straits Settlements, and knew more about them than I did. And he insisted on being edified instead of amused. He said it might be uncomfortable, but it was part of the white man's burden. "But it's insanitary!" I said in a pained voice. "In those climates nobody should ever wear anything that can't be washed. Nobody ever does, except at night. But you can't wash your dress suit!" "It doesn't matter," said Augustus firmly. "Self-respect is more than sanitation!" and he meant it. Of course logical consistency is Augustus's favourite vice. But though most of us are not quite so downright about it, I fancy we are all more or less tarred with the same brush. We all feel rather different when we have our Sunday clothes on. It is not for nothing that the ribald song lays down the doctrine:

If you don't wear a collar and a tie,
You won't go to Heaven when you die!

It is no use denying that we have rather a tendency to judge ourselves and our neighbours in terms of haberdashery. We do feel that there is something not quite right with a country where everybody's coat is the worse for wear, and everybody's collar (if he has one) is rather frayed at the edges, and most of the population are distinctly behindhand with their shaving, and nobody's shoes are really properly polished.

"Well," says the School Teacher, "but that *does* rather worry me. I know you'll tell me that clothes are meant to keep people warm, but surely smartness does count for something. I don't say it matters tremendously, but I *would* rather see people better dressed. I don't mean that one class should be better dressed than another, but why shouldn't they *all* have good coats to their backs, and shave themselves in the morning, and clean their shoes properly?"

This Russian Business

I glanced idly at her own shoes (keeping mine well under my chair). "Yes, I know," she said, "they don't do me any credit. But that is because that cheap tin of polish you bought at the stall yesterday is no good. I worked on those shoes for a quarter of an hour, and that's the best I could do." It seemed pretty clear that it was all my fault. But later on we discovered that all the shoe-polish available anywhere, without exception, was equally bad. It was all oily, and while it made quite a good dressing to keep the water out, it was no use whatever as far as producing a shine was concerned. But it was cheap. Similarly, we found out that there was a reason why there was almost as much stubble on Russian faces as in Russian fields. It was quite simple. There were at that time practically no barber's shops even in Leningrad or Moscow, except at the hotels, and there was an extraordinary dearth of razors. The Moscow authorities made some attempt to cope with the shaving difficulty by providing several scores of shops where for a trifling charge the Muscovite could hire a razor and other accessories to remove the undergrowth from his face. They had evidently managed to scrape up a few score or a few hundred razors for that. But to find (that is, to make or import) a few hundreds of thousands or even millions of razors for individual use was evidently still beyond their powers.

VII

Odious Comparisons

IT IS NOT only traffic arrangements and clothes and razors. As one sees more of the country, one cannot help getting the impression that there is, and has long been, a considerable deficiency in most of the articles and arrangements which make for comfort and convenience. The footpaths are often badly paved and inadequately repaired, especially in the side streets, and the roadway surfaces are far from faultless. In these respects Moscow and Leningrad are much on a level with Athens and Constantinople, not with London or Paris or Berlin. Only in the Russian cities there are some signs that the arrears are at last being taken in hand; there are repair works in progress which make many sections of streets almost impassable. Then the sanitary arrangements in hotels, railways and other public places are often a little below the mark. These places generally seem to be clean once in the day, but they have a way of degenerating towards evening. Then the bathrooms (where they exist) have a tendency to be out of order, and even definitely out of commission. To get a bath, a complete bath of one's whole person, is always a very difficult and complicated affair.

Augustus was at first inclined to blame Communism for all this. But after we had managed to decipher some of the frenzied placards with which all public conveniences were plastered, and had seen some other signs of the incessant and almost passionate official propaganda appealing for public cleanliness in this and other directions, he relented, and began to ascribe all these defects to the Slav temperament. It seemed to me that several centuries of poverty

This Russian Business

and wretchedness might have had a good deal to do with it. Water-closets and bathrooms are unknown to man in a state of nature. The well-known nobility of the savage is attained entirely without their aid. These arrangements are among the minor gifts of a laborious civilisation, and most of history has transacted itself without them. It is not so long since our own forefathers despised the very notion of such things, and I doubt if there is any country in Europe where they can even now be said to be in universal use. And where they are of comparatively recent introduction, it is natural enough that they should not at first be very well looked after. When whole populations are forced to live in hovels, you cannot expect them to have the same habits as if they lived in palaces, or even in service flats, at any rate, not unless you are quite sure that your own behaviour would suffer no deterioration if you spent the rest of your lifetime in a hovel. The trouble is that the amenities of civilisation always begin in palaces, and the inhabitants of palaces have usually shown a regrettable lack of zeal in popularising new inventions and improvements. The English baron of the Middle Ages did not wash any more than he could help. When his descendants took to morning tubs, and even found that they were rather pleasant, they did not start a crusade for popularising the use of tubs among farm labourers. That is just where Russian Bolshevism is different, or, as Augustus would say, pretends to be different. The whole point of Bolshevism, if it has a point (which Augustus denies), is to popularise the advantages of civilisation. For present-day Russia the guiding principle in these matters is that the available supply of comforts and amenities is to be thrown into hotchpotch, as the lawyers say. There is to be no engrossing of civilisation by a moneyed class, to the detriment of the rest of the nation. Whenever there are not enough of the fruits of civilisation

Odious Comparisons

to go round, there are obviously two possible solutions of the difficulty. Either a privileged class can have enough, which is more than their fair share, and the masses of the people can have what is left. Or else everybody can share alike, in which case nobody will be very comfortable, and probably nobody will be desperately uncomfortable. Up to the present there has never been enough to go round. There are not to-day anything like enough civilised amenities, even of the plainer kinds, either in Russia or in Western Europe, although Russia is worse provided than we are. In Russia everybody has to put up with the same discomfort and inconvenience for the time being. In the West the standard is high for those who can afford it, and much lower for all the rest, and this difference extends even to the barest necessities, the elementary decencies of life. No one who has ever pottered about the meaner districts of Southern European cities will maintain that there are enough water-closets for the poorer population, or that the ones that exist are anything to be proud of. The more northerly countries do rather better. But they could easily do better still, especially in city slums.

And as for washing, the difference between a backward country like Russia and a country like France or England is perhaps not so great as it looks, nor is the advantage, such as it is, of any very long standing. There are still a good many English homes without bathrooms, and such a thing was decidedly a rarity not so many years past, especially in working-class houses. Wherever there is no bathroom, the frequency of the bath naturally diminishes as the difficulties increase. It is true that the Englishman's daily tub used to be a matter of national pride; but of course that was pure legend. There never was any such thing. The only Englishmen who took daily tubs were those who were in a position to dodge the labour of getting them

This Russian Business

ready, which labour they handed over to other Englishmen (or Englishwomen) who themselves belonged to the comparatively bathless classes. Where the matter rested on the normal healthy basis of doing one's own dirty work, it is safe to say that the national standard of cleanliness never exceeded the level of the Saturday-night bath. Well, in Russia one doubts if the average ablutions are anything like as frequent, especially amongst the peasants, and for that state of things Augustus and I are agreed to blame either the way in which God made Russians, or the historic system of squeezing Russia for the benefit of the boyars and the Romanoffs.

All such comparisons between country and country are odious, but the trouble is that one cannot possibly help making them. There is no absolute standard of sanitation or personal cleanliness or comfort or convenience, or any of the material advantages of civilisation. Where we thought the Russian standard was good, we meant that it was about as good as our own, or better; where it seemed bad, what we were thinking of was that things were better done in England. It is the easiest way to judge, and obviously the right way. Only one must be sure that one is comparing analogous things. One must compare Russian conditions with the conditions of the English working classes, not with the conditions of Londoners living in the West End. The West End is not a fair sample of London. But, roughly speaking, every part of Moscow is a fair sample of Moscow.

Even upon that standard/Russia does seem to be at present obviously behindhand, though not as much as one at first believes. The original cause lies in a thousand years of history, and is aptly symbolised by the Russian grandees who walked about Elizabeth's audience chambers dropping both pearls and vermin. It is the pearls, in some degree, which account for the vermin. The immediate cause is a

Odious Comparisons

negative one; no ruling power in Russia until the Bolsheviks (and they only in these latter years) has ever made the slightest effort to reform these things. Of course it is possible to explain the matter quite simply, without any troublesome searching out of remote causes. If you do not like Communism, the most obvious and satisfying explanation is that Communists, *qua* Communists, do not wash, and so on for any other defects that you notice. But that is rather too easy; it is too obvious that all these things are of long standing. If we blame the Bolsheviks for those drawbacks of Russian civilisation, the Bolsheviks may blame the Coalition Government for the slums of London, and then it will be anybody's dog-fight. The sins of Bolshevism lie in quite other directions. In fact, the attitude of the present régime on these matters is clearly to be counted to them for righteousness. It is impossible not to be impressed by the scope and intensity of the effort now being made to overcome all these faults, both by the introduction of rigorous measures of public sanitation and by a wide and vigorous propaganda among all sections of the population. Augustus was rather amused by the *naïveté* of some Government propaganda in favour of washing which he had got hold of, where statistics were given as to the increasing use of public bathing establishments. He used to assert unblushingly that it was part of the Five Years Plan. He said that every local Soviet had to show results according to a fixed programme: so many millions of baths to be taken by 1931, so many more in 1932, and what he rather aptly called a complete liquidation of the unwashed before the Plan ended. But he never produced his authority for these ribald statements.

VIII

"U. S. S. R. In Construction"

SO MUCH FOR cleanliness, which we all know to be next to godliness, a virtue, this last, to which the Bolsheviks cannot reasonably pretend. Some way after these two qualities there come those other matters of roads and razors and clothing and the like. These are plainly in a different category. They are not, on the face of them, things which have been defective from time immemorial. Nor does it seem plausible to put them down to racial temperament. Most people will consent to wear good clothes if they have them. Everybody would rather not walk on broken and muddy pavements. One's attitude towards the hair on one's face may be a different matter. Certainly some people prefer to let it grow altogether, and Russians, even real Russians, are rather given to that. But the people who remain permanently half-shaven just for the fun of it must surely be in a minority. At any rate you can hardly blame their temperaments for it until you have supplied them with razors, or otherwise enabled them to get a shave without walking a mile to the nearest barber's shop and waiting an hour or two for their turn.

All these are needs to be met by the provision of various commodities or services year by year, and even month by month. If there was a justifiable and quite inevitable dearth ten years ago, it does not follow that there ought to be a dearth now. It is not a question of deep psychological faults impressed by long centuries in the human material, against which the most active kind of efficiency might for many years spend all its energies in vain. These are material and practical tasks, and a few years at most should be

“U.S.S.R. In Construction”

enough to overtake arrears, if the will and the wealth are there. It may be true that the Czars did no better, even that in some things they did much worse. Certainly the working men who were shot down in the streets of Petersburg in 1905 were far more ragged (if pictures may be believed) than the crowds who now encumber those same streets. Nor, I am told, were the streets of Petersburg any better mended then than they are to-day, and I believe that the streets of Moscow, which was not then the capital, were a good deal worse. And it is pretty evident that both housing and sanitation are on the whole somewhat better than before. But it is clear that all that is only partly to the point, even when the utmost allowances have been made, and the benefit of the doubt bestowed wherever it may be called for. A social order that challenges the whole civilised world cannot rest upon its laurels, and justify its pretensions, merely on the ground that it is not so bad as the Russian autocracy. Let us admit that there may be progress, even considerable progress. But progress upon an order, or a disorder, so dark and evil, so anachronistic and altogether shameful as Czarist Russia is surely not a matter for excessive self-congratulation. Half the world expects better things from the new Russia. The other half expects worse things before the end.

Of course there is an answer to that kind of criticism, and it is quite obviously a valid answer—for the time being. It is this, that the time for judging has not yet arrived, that criticism must await the event, that you cannot reasonably find fault with a dinner before it is cooked. The Communist has still the right to cry patience, to say that all this will come in good time. Although the education of backward peoples is certainly the most difficult of all tasks, the business of clothing and housing them and providing them all with the ordinary amenities of life

This Russian Business

is also no mean enterprise. This is a task with which the most advanced countries in the world, after one hundred and fifty years of industrial Capitalism, are still grievously behindhand. Russia has so far had but a bare dozen years of peace to labour in, and even that period began with the most disastrous famine in her history. It will surely be reasonable to wait at least another ten or fifteen years before demanding news of the completion of a task which Europe still makes rather a mess of after more than a century's progress.

Well, let us by all means wait, since needs must; and if we hesitate to condemn the Russian effort before it has had time to unfold its energies, perhaps we shall be on better ground for deprecating the Russian criticism of our millions of unemployed, our burning of corn and coffee to keep the prices up, our efforts to restrict the production of things that thousands go hungry for, and all the other wild and wicked happenings which we generally blame on to the World Crisis, as if the Crisis were some kind of uncontrollable and malignant Joss whom we had unwittingly offended, and not the very work of our own foolish hands.

But even if common fairness requires the main question to be postponed, there is one difficulty of a more immediate kind. For, even admitting that the rate of progress in Russia is as fast as any reasonable man could wish, the fact still remains that progress is not equal all along the line. Certain departments of economy are definitely behind the rest, and they are not the most difficult ones. It seems a little strange that the constructive forces of Russia, which have apparently made a reasonably good job of running ships and managing railways, growing corn, producing butter and timber and petrol, mining coal, manufacturing steel, even making machinery, should at the same time be

“U.S.S.R. *In Construction*”

comparatively far behind in these other matters, especially as some of them appear to be quite vital matters. The most vital of all is housing. Of course all Europe suffered from a desperate housing shortage after the war. If during four long years the money and energy which normally goes into building houses is spent in knocking down and burning other people's houses, it is natural enough that when several millions of soldiers at last come home they should discover that they have no homes to go to. But since then the richer countries have got somewhere near catching up arrears of building. Russia is still among the most backward. Even before the war the bulk of the population was very badly housed. And then the Russians (not without gratuitous help from the Western Powers) spent an extra year or two, after everyone else had finished, in knocking houses down instead of putting them up. The result is that the housing shortage in the cities has been and still is very acute. Here again the levelling up process has been at work, and this has somewhat mitigated the congestion. All the available accommodation is pressed into the general service. The palaces of the aristocrats and the spacious homes of the rich have been requisitioned for the public need; accommodation is strictly rationed, and an extremely jealous watchfulness by interested parties (and few people are so satisfied with their present lodging as not to be interested) ensures that nobody monopolises more than his fair share. But even so everybody is extremely cramped. Single men and single women often sleep four, ten, twenty, forty to a room, according to the nature of the accommodation available. If you hear that anyone is lucky enough to have a room to himself or herself, you can be pretty sure that the room is not big enough to hold two beds. Stalin and his family have two small rooms in the Kremlin, and the President of the Republic is no better served.

This Russian Business

It is true that building is now going on upon a fairly large scale in most of the cities, and the rate of progress is not slow. But this activity is only of very recent date, and as the population grows by leaps and bounds, it will probably be a long time before arrears are overtaken. The new accommodation, mostly consisting of so-called communal houses, is of an excellent type, and is eagerly sought for. The two main principles of allotment appear to be that "workers" (i.e. manual workers) have in general the preference over other applicants, and that those whose present quarters are the most unsatisfactory have the first claim on the new accommodation.

But in spite of this quite considerable new effort, housing obviously ranks even now with those branches of Russian economy already mentioned, which lag far behind the tempo of general progress, so that one gets a sort of impression that they have been neglected or forgotten for years. And it seems rather puzzling that this should be so, until one realises that the whole explanation is in that word of order which one hears repeated so often, "but of course the factories must come first!" As soon as one has properly assimilated the fact that of course the factories must come first, the whole thing becomes as plain as a pikestaff. There is one and the same explanation at the bottom of housing shortages and second-rate clothes and crowded trams and muddy footpaths and all the other thousand and one little discomforts of life in present-day Russia. These things have not been so much forgotten or neglected, as they have been deliberately postponed. It is the Five Years Plan once more. Whenever you get to the bottom of anything in this country, you always find the Five Years Plan. You are continually being reminded that contemporary Russian life is genetic, not static, that you are not gazing on a condition of things, but watching a

"U.S.S.R. In Construction"

process. The old Russia is gone; the new Russia is being built; it is a partly realised idea, not a completed organic whole. They label it so: "U.S.S.R. In Construction," as if it were the skeleton of some half-finished skyscraper, all cement piles and steel ribs and girders, with scaffolding all over it, and a world of workmen busy hammering rivets or puddling mortar; donkey-engines buzzing, cranes lifting beams to the upper stories, and a huge yard all round the base filled with disorderly heaps of building material, and surrounded by a fence with inhospitable notices, "No Admittance except on Business." And it really is like that, and even though you are allowed in to see the works going on, you sometimes have a feeling of being rather in the way, as if you ought to have waited till the opening day, and then to have come there in your Sunday clothes and listened to the speeches. Only it is not a skyscraper that is being built, but a country, a social order, and even in some sense a nation; it is the common life of millions on millions of men that is being constructed. All building is costly, and the resources of Russia are terribly scanty. The main things have to come first; whatever is essential to the general plan must go forward at all costs; whatever is less urgent must be postponed. First let us have the machinery of life; its amenities will come later on. In that ruthless trying and choosing, the bare necessities of personal existence are all that can be strictly afforded; luxuries must be dispensed with for the time being, even ordinary comforts and conveniences have to be brought down to bedrock. If it is a choice between razors and reaping machines, it is clear that the harvest must come first. It is a policy not always very logically carried out; something must be allowed to human weakness. But in the main the Plan is so conceived and so executed, and if the inevitable result is that Russian life meanwhile is arranged upon a

This Russian Business

somewhat Spartan scale, this does not appear to mean, for the working population, that commodities are scarcer or life harder than they were in pre-war days, but only that the rate of progress, the degree of improvement upon Czarist times, is slower and smaller than it might otherwise be.

Of course the story is not new. Russia is not the first country to transform itself laboriously from a poor agricultural country to a rich industrial one. A hundred years ago, more or less, England and France and Germany were busy with the same task, and on that occasion also the enterprise was somewhat complicated by the waste and exhaustion of a great war. Then also, the accumulation of the capital necessary for construction on a large scale involved much hardship and suffering. Yet however history repeats itself, there is at least one quite novel element in the Russian version of the story, and that is that the sum total of inevitable hardship is equally spread over the whole population, whereas in those other countries the misery of the poor paid for all. At least, so the Russians say

IX

How Much is a Rouble?

HOW MUCH HARDSHIP there really is in Russia, what the present standard of life amounts to in comparison with other countries, is one of those questions on which most of us feel that we should be a little clearer in our minds if we had not heard quite so much about it. To begin with, it is evident that not everybody means the same thing by hardship. To some it means going hungry and barefoot; to others it means doing without luxuries. And we do not all draw the same line between luxuries and necessities. There are plenty of people who would rather go short on boots than on cigarettes, and many a wench will save on her lunches to buy lipstick. And since the standard of comparison is so personal a thing, it is often difficult to set a value on impressions of well-being or otherwise brought back by travellers, or even on the confessions of those who have lived in the country for a long period. For example, the correspondent of a leading Paris newspaper made a tour of Russia in the autumn of 1931, and his impressions of social conditions in that country, which were mostly unfavourable, were duly published on the front page. Amongst the elements on which these impressions were based was a conversation in Moscow with a Russian lady who spoke perfect French, and had evidently lived abroad in happier times. She, after looking this way and that, confided to the correspondent, in a whisper, that life in contemporary Russia was hell (*c'est l'enfer*). This rather startling generalisation, however, was immediately somewhat discounted by a complaint that it was practically impossible to purchase silk stockings except at

This Russian Business

prohibitive prices. As no other specific instance of the infernal quality of Muscovite existence was mentioned, one felt compelled to disregard that piece of testimony, at least provisionally, and to continue elsewhere the inquiry into the heavenliness or hellishness of Moscow life. But it was easy to realise how very much one might have been misled, and how exaggerated a value would have attached to the lady's generalisation, if the silk stockings had been left out of the story. As it was, the journalist commiserated with the unhappy woman on the necessity of clothing her charming legs (he *says* he said textually, "vos jambes charmantes, Madame") with a baser fabric; and then they forgot their squalid surroundings in talk of Paris, where silken legs are recognised as the inalienable right of every woman who has any legs worth looking at.

But if one turns from lending a sympathetic ear to ladies' confidences, and applies oneself to direct observation, the difficulties are still very considerable. Certainly one can form some notions as to what clothing is usually worn, and as to several other matters not without importance. But the scope of one's observations is somewhat limited; one does not get anything like a comprehensive view of a city's life merely by watching the citizens walking about its streets, nor even through such scanty opportunities as one has of seeing them at work or at play. One test of welfare, or rather of ill-faring, which is often appealed to, is the extent to which shop queues exist. Everybody has seen the queues in Russian cities. These are common enough. Certainly they are not as a rule very long queues, not nearly so long as those outside the cinemas. They all seem quite orderly, and there does not seem to be any struggling or disputing about places, nor any policemen or other officials supervising them. As far as one can see, the people seem to get the things they come for. These

How Much is a Rouble ?

are mostly groceries and articles of clothing, and also meat. There do not appear to be any bread queues. Personally I never saw a queue breaking up because the last article was already sold, so that I am ignorant whether that ever happens or not. Although the queues are short, they often seem to stay there a good while. The people seem to get in and get their business done with reasonable speed, but the tail-end of the queue (if a tail can have a tail) is constantly renewed by fresh arrivals. I suspect that a good part of this standing in queues is due rather to the insufficiency of shops than to the scarcity of the commodity. And this seems to be partly borne out by the fact that bakeries and places where they sell bread-stuffs, which are very numerous, do not appear to have queues in front of them.

It is easy to exaggerate the importance of queues as an index of want or scarcity. A queue is surely rather an index either of inadequate machinery for distribution, as where the shops or the men in the shops are not enough to deal with the needs of the customers at rush hours, or else of badly managed rationing. You may have the most acute scarcity of the most essential commodities, and you may ration them down to the extreme limit, but there is no earthly need for queues because of that. The queue forms (apart from the above-mentioned faults in distribution) either because there is no rationing system at all, and the first to come are the only ones to be served if supplies will not go round, or else because ration tickets have been issued for more beef or boots than there are in the store, which is an indication of the incompetence of the rationing authorities, far more than of the extent of the scarcity. If the rationing system were intelligently managed, you might easily have shortages and scarcities down to sheer starvation-point, and never one single queue.

This Russian Business

On the other hand, the existence of queues does not necessarily imply a scarcity at all. Even the theatre lines do not really prove that there are not seats enough for most or even all of the people waiting. Probably they will all get in. It is a question of better seats and worse seats, and probably half the time the game is not worth the candle. It does not require the pressure of sharp need to make people stand in queues. The thousands on thousands of Western women who wait long hours for the doors to be opened at bargain sales, and who on occasion (if tales be true) fight like furies and tear each other's faces and furbelows in order to purchase a lace remnant or a yard of ribbon for twice its value (reduced, for that morning only, from five times its value)—these Maenad crowds are perhaps scarcely to be taken as conclusive evidence of the extreme scarcity of gewgaws among British women. And then too, the queue is something of an institution in Russian shops, even in the special shops where tourists and other foreigners are catered for, and no question of rationing or scarcity arises. You buy the articles you want in various parts of the establishment, and then you spend anything from five minutes to a quarter of an hour standing in a queue at the cash-desk before you are allowed to pay for them. But then there are grocers in London who do the same thing.

One might suppose that the appearance of the people standing in queues would give some inkling of how well they were fed, at least. My own impression of those I saw is that they were average-looking in that respect. But Augustus says they almost all looked pinched and half-starved, as far as he remembers. Upon this I made a determined canvass of the whole party. Five people said they looked plump and well fed. Six agreed with Augustus. The remaining ten or eleven said they did not notice par-

How Much is a Rouble?

ticularly. So there you are. Of course those ten or eleven were just the people who were neither Communists nor anti-Communists. One of the most distressing things about these visits to Russia is the almost complete inarticulateness of all the people who have *not* got bees in their bonnets.

Perhaps the most obvious way of judging the standard of living is to find out, if you can, what is the income of the people. This would seem at first sight to be the safest of all tests, but even that fails in Russia. It is easy enough to find out what people are paid, but the real question is what they can buy for this money, and that is a good deal less simple. It is admittedly practically impossible to make any useful generalisation about the cost of living, and that for several reasons. If a typist gets 100 roubles a month, or a factory worker anything from 250 roubles onwards, that means on the face of it an income (at par) of about two pounds ten a week, or a little over six pounds a week respectively, as a minimum. But when one translates that into bread and boots and suits of clothes and chocolates and tickets to picture shows, the difficulties become enormous. In the first place, money translates into bread on quite a different scale from that on which it translates into chocolates or cinemas. Bread costs perhaps the same as in England, or a little less. Plain substantial meals for workmen are rather cheaper. Meat at a shop is probably rather dearer, though not much. But a seat at a cinema costs three or four times as much as in England. So do chocolates and scent and beer and wine and tobacco. Roughly speaking, very roughly, necessities are fairly cheap and luxuries are enormously dear.

So that to form an impression of the degree of welfare of the Russian worker relatively to workers in other countries, one has to calculate first of all what his necessities cost him, and this obviously involves the ticklish

This Russian Business

business of drawing a line and deciding which things *are* necessities. If this sum is deducted from his wages, it will leave a certain surplus. Russian wages are relatively high, and there seems little doubt that this surplus is nominally considerably greater (at any rate for skilled workmen) than the surplus of the corresponding kind of worker in England or France or Germany. But the normal use of a surplus is to buy extras, amusements, luxuries. And the question still remains whether the Russian worker with his larger surplus can buy more or less of the expensive Russian luxuries, than the English worker with his smaller surplus can buy of the cheaper English luxuries.

It is evident that the question has already got rather complicated. But that is by no means the worst. The trouble is that in Russia the amount you can buy of any commodity does not entirely depend on how much money you have got. It also depends on who you are. The price to one category of purchasers is often quite different from the price another category has to pay. This is the famous ticket and ration system. If you are (let us say) a factory worker, you are issued with bread tickets, meat tickets, boot tickets, clothes tickets, and so on, which entitle you to go to the State shops and get your bread or your boots or your suit of clothes at a price enormously less—two or three times less—than that charged to one of the non-privileged classes, a private trader for example. So that the workers' rouble for these purposes is worth two or three times as much as the traders'. Yet there are certain limitations. For your workman's tickets only cover a certain rationed quantity of goods. If you are allowed two suits of clothes a year and you want three, the third may easily cost you more than both the other put together. And so with other commodities. Moreover, there are complications within complications, for the privileged classes (that is,

How Much is a Rouble ?

the working classes) are not all equally privileged. The ration of the manual worker is larger than that of the clerk, and the "shock workers," those who for the carrying out of the Plan have volunteered to work after hours, or at a forced rate of speed, or at extra jobs, are the best treated of all. And now lately there is superimposed upon all this, in certain industries, a system by which the claim to cheap rations may be increased or diminished according to the quantity and quality of the work done. And it should be added that most of these arrangements are subject to modifications and tinkering of various sorts at fairly short intervals.

There are yet other complications, but let those serve. Taking it altogether, it is obviously almost impossible to boil down into a single generalisation one's casual impressions of a state of affairs so extremely complex and piecemeal. And I think one is forced to conclude that the data are far too scattered and shifting for any conclusion as to the level of general well-being, drawn simply from figures of wages and prices, to be worth very much. There remain only one's stray impressions of poverty or welfare resting upon direct observation, and these, however partial and doubtful, are probably the least unsatisfactory of one's sources of information. That is, for one's own purposes. For any other the matter is perhaps hopeless; for though I may honestly declare my impressions to be thus or thus, we know how easy it is to be deceived, and no one can ever be certain that I am not prepossessed by some favourable trifle, or prejudiced by brooding over a dearth of silk stockings.

One extremely ambiguous index of the Russian standard of living is the enormous consumption of highly priced luxuries. Chocolate and lipstick may cost unconscionable sums, but the typist and the factory girl buy them just the

This Russian Business

same, and plenty of them. And the fact that the people in the cafés are rather shabbily dressed does not prevent them from steadily smoking expensive cigarettes, and consuming beer at upwards of four shillings a bottle. It is true that cafés are rather scarce, much scarcer than in any European city except London, and no doubt this is principally due to the large number of co-operative clubs which provide the same amenities at a considerably smaller cost.

Then there are theatres and picture shows. The theatres draw great houses most of the time, in spite of astronomical prices. The cinemas are not so dear, but in Moscow it is almost impossible to get a really good seat in an average show under four roubles (8s. 4d. or so) or often to get any seat at all under about half that sum. But every cinema (and they swarm) is crowded out every night of every week that God makes, and standing in queues to get seats is one of the principal national sports.

Of course all this reckless expenditure has certain fairly obvious explanations. To begin with, a Russian's wages are not normally the sole support of his family. Even with us in these times it is not uncommon for a married woman to go out to work and earn a separate income. But it is still the exception. In Russia it is the rule. The stay-at-home wife is in the minority, a state of things greatly facilitated by the tremendous growth of communal dwelling-houses, crèches, factory restaurants, communal laundries, and similar devices for relieving the wife of the burden of constant domestic labour. And if this arrangement of both partners working doubles the domestic income, or something near that, it is evident that it much more than doubles the margin available for luxuries or quasi-luxuries after the strict needs of life have been supplied.

Then also a Russian worker has little or no incentive

How Much is a Rouble ?

to put away money. When one considers the ordinary motives of saving, it is fairly clear that most of them have little force in a Socialist society, or even in a society only partly Socialist, provided its members are persuaded that that order will endure and perfect itself. Of course there are exceptions. A man may save spasmodically for special occasions, in order to spend again, though perhaps there is hardly so much of that in these fatal and ingenious days of purchasing on time payment. But such as it is now, that sort of thrift might no doubt continue undiminished, however the structure of society were changed. But when it comes to steady saving, the case is surely otherwise. Here the chief and master motive is the fear of poverty, the need to provide beforehand against a cessation of income which in our tumultuous and disorganised society cannot be securely avoided, and can only be foreseen in the sense that out of a number of likely chances one or the other is nearly sure to happen sooner or later. It is safe to say that few workmen pass their lives without being once or several times out of work for long periods through no fault of their own, whether by slackness in the trade, failure of the employer, accident, sickness, or what not. It is then that the worker turns to his nest-egg, the money he has put by week after week by dint of denying himself or his family some immediate satisfaction or contentment, some use of their passing lives which they might otherwise have had.

But if a developed and stable Socialist order is at all possible, the best gift it will have to give its citizens will be a sense of security, the certainty that the work which is their living will be as permanent as any mortal thing can be, or at least that any temporary dislocation of industry, any enforced idleness, will not expose them to the chance of disastrous poverty. Now it is quite clear that the present

This Russian Business

Soviet economy (which of course even its nearest friends do not claim to be a perfected Socialist order) does really tend in that direction; and that is evidently one respect in which the Russian worker is really better off than others, unless all Russian social legislation exists only on paper, and there seems no reason to believe anything of that kind.

Roughly speaking, every worker has a right to support out of the industry to which he belongs, so long as he on his part fulfils the essential duty of honest and conscientious work. If he falls sick the industry pays his wages. If he is laid off for any reason except his own wilful fault, the industry pays his wages, till work is found for him again, either in that industry or in another. And of course in a planned economy, so long as the plan does not utterly break down, unemployment on any large scale or for long periods is impossible; it is a matter of occasional rearrangements and temporary adjustments. Russia is at this moment the only great nation on earth with practically no unemployment whatever. That position has now lasted for some years, and as long as the system at all endures, it is hard to see how the position can be altered in the future. If the Five Years Plan disastrously fails, we may look for the deluge; everything will break; there will be no Russia to talk of. But if the Plan succeeds, or even partially succeeds, it seems certain that such partial and temporary dislocations of particular industries as do now occur from time to time will become less frequent and less serious as the national economy gets over its growing pains and becomes established on a more permanent basis.

It used to be one of the stock arguments against the social legislation of the last fifty years or so that if any kind of provision for the needs or misfortunes of the individual were made at the common cost, this would

How Much is a Rouble ?

undermine the virtue of thrift in the lower orders. And in those days thrift was very highly thought of, and many well-disposed persons belonging to the comfortable classes were genuinely anxious that this good thing should not be taken from the poor.

And however it may go against the grain in these spend-thrift post-war days, one is compelled in mere honesty to admit that they were partly right. Thrift is indeed a virtue, and in spite of cheap jokes about Scotchmen, it is a fundamental and constructive virtue, one of those virtues which distinguish the men and women who bear up the weight of civilisation from the half-wits and wasters who do their perilous best to pull it down. But many virtues depend upon some hard necessity which calls them forth, and if the need is once removed, the virtue is irrelevant; it cannot exercise itself in the void. Thrift, private thrift, the thrift that saves up pennies, is the counterpart of anxiety; it is the soul's reaction against insecurity. One saves for a rainy day, and the more circumstances make one dependent on the weather, the more praiseworthy it is to save. But the Russian with his superfluous roubles is, by hypothesis, in a different position. As was said already, in this so much longed-for Socialist order no one is ever to be anxious or insecure; the job is sure to last, or if it does not, the pay will go on just the same. Never mind whether that is now true or not, nor whether it will be true in the long run. What is important for the moment is that the Russians obviously believe that it is now true, and that it will be still more true in the future. Therefore they feel that they need not save, and it will take more than the shade of Samuel Smiles to change their opinion. But people who need not save have obviously all the more to spend, and so the money goes, even though beer is a dollar a bottle.

Of course there are other motives for saving. The classic

This Russian Business

virtuous working man according to Smiles saves his pennies and "rises in the world," that is, he becomes a small capitalist, and after further saving, combined with honesty and strict attention to business, he becomes a large capitalist, perhaps even a millionaire. But you cannot easily become a capitalist, large or small, in a country where nine-tenths of all the trade and industry is already in the hands of the State, and where, if things go according to programme, the remaining tenth will also be nationalised long before you have saved anything considerable. Then many people save in order to invest the money in stocks and shares, or otherwise lay it out at interest, so that in the end they may have an income independent of their own labour. But in what shall one invest money in a Socialist country? And even if one invests it abroad, the difficulties are not small, especially as the importation and exportation of currency is practically forbidden, and the exportation and importation of goods, unless by licence, is a State monopoly. And there are still graver objections. For a worker who puts money into a private business or otherwise invests it at interest, and draws an income from that, immediately becomes *pro tanto* a capitalist, an exploiter of the labour of others, a "rentier." In the final result he becomes a member of the unprivileged classes, one might almost more truly say, of the penalised classes. He gets no more ration tickets; the purchasing power of his hoarded roubles, and of all the other roubles he gets, is halved or quartered at a single blow. And then he loses his position and social consideration, he is a kind of pariah, almost an enemy of society, a person to be tolerated at best. And he loses all political rights as well; as an "exploiter," a "rentier," he has neither vote in any election nor voice in any deliberation. He is no longer a member of his Soviet nor eligible for any public employment; he will be lucky if he does

How Much is a Rouble ?

not become politically suspect. Taking it all round, it is hard to see how the game could be worth the candle.

Certainly most of what has been said rests upon the assumption already mentioned that the Russian population looks to the future with confidence, that they are satisfied that they will always be as well off as they are to-day, or better off, and that they have no serious doubts of the permanency of the régime by which the conditions of that welfare are guaranteed.

But Augustus avers that none of these things are true; that the apparent confidence of Russians in the continuity of the present order and the security of life and work is only a surface phenomenon; that in their hearts they are full of doubt and dismay; and in short, that they are only whistling to keep their courage up. I am persuaded that he is mistaken; but even if it were so, it is clear that the psychology he thinks he discerns would also lead to spending. For the only practicable alternative to spending is to hoard roubles; and if the régime is unstable, the rouble is like fairy gold and may turn to ashes over-night, so that the most thrifty thing to do with money is to spend it as quickly as possible.

So for one reason or another we are agreed that the contemporary Russian (at least in the towns) spends whatever he gets, and this may be one element in the impression which everybody seems to gather, that he does have a good deal to spend.

But sometimes too one cannot help feeling that any questioning as to the relative well-being of Russian workers is in a very real sense beside the mark. For in one very important respect the things compared are not at all parallel. In spite of all the complexities mentioned, one can perhaps form at least some vague and doubtful idea of his actual present standard of life, even though this sometimes seems

This Russian Business

to lead to the topsy-turvy conclusion that he is rather worse off than we are for necessary things, and rather better off for luxuries. But here again we cannot escape from the all-pervasive Five Years Plan. We obviously have to take into account in some way or other the fact that the whole present organisation of Russian life and work is directed to serve the needs of a huge constructive enterprise, that is, towards acquiring and building up plant, machinery, factories, and all sorts of going enterprises, out of the surplus proceeds of industry from day to day, or in other words, towards accumulating capital on a large scale out of what would otherwise be expendable income. Which obviously boils down to this; that although the individual Russian may be spendthrift, collectively he is putting by enormous sums of money, or rather investing those sums in what will at some not distant day be exceedingly profitable enterprises. That is, if the Plan succeeds. When the large-scale industrialisation of the land is completed, the accumulation of money to pay for the process will no longer be necessary. The monthly or yearly tribute out of industry will cease, and for the future all that wealth will flow back again into the wages fund from which it came. Whether that reflux takes the form of further rises in wages, or of reductions in the price of commodities, makes little difference; the result is the same. The difference, the essential difference, between the situation of the Russian and that of the Englishman or the German, is that the Russian is himself both worker and capitalist. He is collectively in exactly the same position as a struggling factory-owner or small working capitalist in Western countries, who for the present lives meagrely, in order to have more money to build up the business out of which he expects to live on a larger scale in the future.

Nor is the theory of the Plan quite so Spartan as a hasty

How Much is a Rouble ?

review might suggest. The main hope of improvement is postponed till the completion of the term, but some small comfort there is meanwhile, and it is small only by comparison with their extravagant hopes (if they are extravagant) and not by comparison with the past, nor even with the rate of progress abroad. The Plan itself provides for progressive improvements during the five-year term in hours of labour, housing, and real wages; that is, wages considered on terms of the cost of living. As Augustus gracefully puts it, a few bones have been flung to the workers to keep them quiet. How much meat there is on those bones, or, in more pedestrian language, how far the promises of the Plan are actually being realised, is a question which brings us into the regions of acrid and unprofitable controversy. The Soviet Planning Commission, which ought to know, and which is probably as candid as most Government bodies elsewhere (a rather faint kind of praise), says that during the first three years of the Plan effective wages rose on the average by eighteen per cent. But that is a kind of calculation we have had so much of since the war that it no longer makes much impression on the minds of a generation which has grown rather agnostic on such matters. The improvements in the hours of labour are more obvious and easier to test. In all factories the normal working hours are now seven a day—a level not generally reached elsewhere in Europe or America. And the introduction of the six-day week (with or without the “unbroken working week”) gives every worker one free day in every six (for which he is paid) instead of one in seven as formerly. These (for as long as they last) are obviously positive gains. So that one way or another there may be a good deal of indirect (and even unconscious) collective thrift to set against the spate of personal spending. And as far as reliance on such things may be regarded as an explanation of cheer-

This Russian Business

ful extravagance in the matter of luxuries, it obviously does not matter whether the official story of social betterment is true in every detail, or false from the bottom up. It is clearly sufficient if the population believe it to be true. And to persuade populations that they are better off than they are is, of course, one of the principal cares of all prudent Governments, just as persuading them that they are worse off is the chief employment of every opposition.

X

Living Communally

WE ALL KNOW how the meaning of words changes, but it has not been as much noticed that their emotional content changes too. The rallying-cries of one generation leave the next generation cold, but they will still shout for (or against) some other phrase which means exactly the same. "Socialism" and "Communism" are words of this kind. There is no doubt that in these times the term "Communism" is by far the more effective irritant of the two. It stimulates most people to either positive or negative reactions. Nearly everybody is determined to die in the last ditch either for it or against it. But you can't arouse so much excitement about Socialism. Certainly the English morning newspapers still religiously label Labour politicians "Socialists," and the Labour Party the "Socialist Party," with the obvious view of crying them down, but one doubts if anyone ever voted against them on that account. In Austria, on the other hand, the Conservative papers insist on calling their opponents "Marxists," and nothing else. But in England you could not bait even the most choleric Tory by calling him a Marxist. He would probably stare at you for a moment and then reply coldly that he was a member of the Church of England, or that you must be thinking of somebody else of the same name. But if you called him a Communist, you would stand a very fair chance of provoking a little honest indignation. Of course for a good many years "Socialist" was a really useful term of abuse. But by the time the war broke out the man in the street had got used to Socialism, although his notions of Socialist doctrine may

This Russian Business

perhaps have been still a little crude. It was still possible to impress him with the absurdity of a "Saturday night divide." And the fact that workers in that cause were accustomed to address and refer to each other as "Comrade" still furnished material for threadbare jokes, when nothing more could be done with Scotchmen and mothers-in-law. But there was a mild autumnal flavour about this ridicule which did not even distantly recall the fury of the earlier invective. In Victorian times the Socialist attack on wealth was answered by the allegation that Socialist leaders were godless and immoral persons, that they never went to church, and kept several mistresses each out of the profits of demagoguery. But by 1914 all that was definitely out of date. One no longer heard very much of the personal wickedness of Socialist leaders. People had ceased to care much whether other people went to church or not, and even accusations about free love were not the draw they used to be, except perhaps in America. So that to be a Socialist was by then almost consistent with certain inferior kinds of respectability.

Then the Socialist organisations, like everything else, went through the crucible of the war, and came out changed, in their case considerably for the better. Western Socialists, at least, ceased altogether to be godless and immoral. Their somewhat doubtful and shaky pre-war respectability had become a solid and unquestionable thing; they began to wear stiff collars, and became pillars of the State.

The reason for this change was, of course, that they had ceased to be Socialists, except in a Pickwickian sense. In several countries, immediately after the war, the Socialist parties formed governments, and took the reins of power into their hands. The breathless nations waited for the next Saturday night, to see how much it would pan out. But there was no divide. Nothing at all happened. And

Living Communally

after a while everybody realised that nothing much was ever likely to happen. The nations breathed out again, remarked casually that they were jiggered, spat on their horny hands, and went on with the job.

But a certain number of the rank and file supporters of the Socialist parties became very angry. They accused their leaders of treachery, corruption, turning their coats, and what not. And they split off, these unreasonable literal men, and formed a party of their own. Of course they had to find a name for it. To call it the "Real Socialist Party" or the "Only Genuine Socialist Party" would have seemed a little feeble. Besides, there was a precedent at hand. In one European state, Russia, there was a Socialist Party in power which, while it was daily accused of almost everything else, could not possibly be accused of inactivity. And it had just baptised itself the Communist Party. So the Western dissidents boldly threw the old name overboard altogether, and called themselves Communists too. The word was of course far from new. But Socialism had supplanted it for most purposes, and had long enjoyed the exclusive right of spelling itself with a capital letter. Now the tables were turned.

The term "Communist" is unfortunately not quite so clear in its meaning, except to the initiated. It suggests the primitive Christian "community of goods." It has associations with the mediaeval "commune," in the sense of a self-governing town. It has, of course, historical and doctrinal connections with the body that ruled Paris in 1870, until Thiers made his unholy bargain with the Prussians. And it is vaguely cognate with adjectives like "common" and "communal," and suggests to the minds of many people all sorts of things such as eating at a common table, belonging to the same savage tribe, having wives in common, and what not.

This Russian Business

Now most of these associations are quite extraneous to the plain meaning of the word as now used. But even quite reasonable and educated people do nevertheless often wonder how far Socialism, or Communism (which they usually take to be a specially virulent form of the infection), implies holding or performing in common various kinds of personal property or personal activities which seem to them to belong peculiarly and necessarily to the individual alone. The abstract question has little interest; it is too much in the air. But how far in Russia does it actually happen that the personal life of the ordinary citizen is lived perforce in a closer and more intimate contact with other lives? What inroads, if any, does the working out of Socialist doctrine make on ordinary private life? In a word, is the human hive any less human and any more of a hive in Russia than out of it, and if so how much?

To begin with, there is of course the famous story of the decree for the community of women. It is said that there really was some vague resolution in that sense passed in an excited moment by the local soviet of a village somewhere near the Urals. Whether that be so or not the story as presented to the supposedly credulous public of Western Europe had of course its origins very much nearer home. I could never quite make out how the thing was supposed to work. Presumably all the women in a given district were lined up every six months or so, and the male population drew lots for first pick. Whether it was obligatory on the last man to take what was left, or whether he had the option of "passing," as in card games, was never really clear. It would be interesting also to speculate on whether a woman-hater who happened to draw the first number out of the Soviet hat would be free to put his rights up to auction if he liked. Of course six months may not have been the term. I don't remember

Living Communally

that I ever saw any time mentioned. Perhaps it was a week. Or perhaps it was only a day—a kind of game of musical wives. I fully intended to make conscientious inquiry into all these points, but unfortunately the Russians applied to for information did not seem to have ever heard of any such arrangement. And as many of them were women, one would have expected them to know about it. No, I am afraid that Russia is not the paradise for bachelors that it is cracked up to be. In the most essential point, marriage is hedged about with the same unnecessary fuss, the same ridiculous red tape, as in our own country. You still have to get the woman's consent. It is not right. It is not revolutionary. It is not nearly as shocking as I hoped it would be. But it is the disappointing fact.

But quite apart from romantic tales of that sort, everybody agrees that there are really some cases where people are thrown much more together than with us. In some hotels, in most hostels, and in all sorts of buildings and parts of buildings converted from their original purpose into living accommodation, it is common to have large rooms with five, ten, twenty, or thirty beds in them. In the Peasants' Hostel in Moscow, that caravanserai where every peasant may stay three days almost for nothing whenever he comes to town upon his affairs, they have dormitories with from forty to fifty beds. The common table is a regular institution in the eating-houses of factories, communal lodging-houses, collective farms, and so on. In an ordinary hotel it is common to see five or six men in various stages of morning undress waiting their turn at the single water-tap in the washing-room. There is a basin under the tap, but one need not mention that, because no one ever uses it, at any rate not for the purpose of collecting water. The jet from the tap shoots *upwards*, and you catch the water in your palms on the descending curve. It is

This Russian Business

not quite so convenient as using the basin, but I have been assured that it is more hygienic. Anyway, you can't use the basin even if you want to, because it is not provided with a plug. I don't mean that the plug has been lost. There never was a plug.

Then there are some public or semi-public places for the washing of clothes, such as one sees in most Continental towns. In the communal houses there are similar facilities, but most of the tenants have their washing done in the communal laundry, which is extremely cheap. Then of course there are crèches everywhere: crèches at these same communal houses, where the women leave their babies when they go out; crèches at all the factories, crèches at hospitals, crèches at peasants' rest-houses, crèches at workers' clubs.

These are trite and familiar instances, and the list might, I should think, be extended considerably. They do obviously tend to create an impression of people living in some respects a good deal closer to each other than they do in Western Europe. But on second thoughts one realises that nearly every one of these examples is ambiguous in one way or another. For one thing, there is that tremendous housing shortage, a problem of necessity peculiarly critical in a country where war and famine kept building at a complete standstill for almost nine years, and where at present the annual increase of population is almost three millions. But that difficulty will disappear in time. Meanwhile there is little sense in reading far-fetched political or doctrinal explanations into so very obvious a set of facts. The plainest reason for sleeping twenty to a room is that there are twenty people and only one room, a reason which will disappear as soon as nineteen more rooms are built.

Then of course in another way one's data are still more ambiguous, and this for reasons already mentioned in

Living Communally

another connection. The degree to which people are thrown together often depends largely upon their resources, upon how far the nature of their living accommodation makes privacy possible. This would seem to boil down to a question of riches and poverty, and no doubt that is the first and substantial cause of all such differences, but the cleavage may be accentuated by psychological factors, by ingrained prejudice or mere inveterate custom.

In Western Europe there is a very clear division between the kind of accommodation provided for the labouring classes and the kind provided for people who work with their collars on. The division may be right or wrong, snobbish or merely matter-of-fact, but it is always there. There are working-men's lodging-houses and middle-class lodging-houses, workmen's restaurants and "better class" restaurants, and so on. But in Russia all this accommodation is now thrown into hotchpotch. There is in general no setting apart of the more select apartment house or the superior restaurant, except for the comparatively few places where luxury is sold to Nepmen and the richer tourists at almost incredible prices. And one result of this general levelling tendency is to make comparison somewhat difficult, especially for visitors from the West who belong to what Russia still describes, with a shade of condescension in these days, as the *intelligentsia*, that is, the educated classes. For in the West it is precisely among the "*intelligentsia*" that social prejudices, and the secret sense of caste, are often at their strongest. These classes in England (and everywhere else) are often very badly paid. In many cases they are far worse off financially than skilled workmen. But for all that they do not live like workmen nor mix with workmen. They cling tenaciously to the remnants of a genteel existence. They still segregate themselves in residential suburbs and spend too much on

This Russian Business

clothes, and when they eat abroad they will always pay sixpence more for their dinners in order to have them "served nicely." The result is that most of the so-called educated classes have really very little notion of how life is lived by the working classes in their own country, and even what they do know does not readily occur to their minds as a standard of comparison for life abroad. And when one does begin to ask how much of this apparently half-communal way of living in Russia might be almost exactly paralleled by the ordinary existence of the labouring classes in English cities or on the English countryside, one is apt to find that the real differences are very much smaller than they seemed, and that a good many of them disappear altogether. Then again perhaps some allowance has really to be made for the Slav temperament. The miniature fountain and the bottomless wash-basin are obviously a much older institution than the Soviet power, and one suspects also that the habit of washing at a common fount (even when some sort of provision does exist in one's bedroom) is not a practice imposed from above by doctrinaire despots, but rather a habit formed long ago, which the slow-moving Russian mind has not yet discarded. Plenty of Englishmen wash their faces at the pump to this day. But when advancing civilisation brings them wash-basins, they mostly accommodate themselves to a changed world, and use the basins instead. It requires an almost Oriental conservatism to deliberately instal miniature pumps above the basin, and to mutilate the basin so as to convert it into a mere sink; and all for the sake of dodging the necessity of inventing a new set of motions when performing one's toilet.

All told, the "communal" side of Communism in Russia (in that strained sense of the word) seems to boil down to very little. And so far as one can see, the nationalisation

Living Communally

or municipalisation of property has kept strictly within the time-honoured definition—"the means of production, distribution, and exchange." A man rents his own house or his own flat or room, and if he does not own it, his rent is so reasonable that he probably does not want to. He does own his own furniture, even in "communal houses," and in spite of the heated imaginations of Western journalists, neither his wife nor his shirt is held at a weekly rent. He has, or refuses to have, his own piano or his own wireless set, and if ever Russia becomes rich enough (which it probably will do unless it crashes altogether) I cannot see anything whatever to prevent his owning his own motor-car. The Russians may still have some "communal" habits which seem a little strange to Westerners, but that is a matter of national peculiarities and not of economic systems. Many Americans, for example, have a habit of dispensing with fences or hedges between their gardens and the street, as also between their gardens and the next-door gardens; and that seems to many English people an unfortunate sacrifice of privacy. But in America the practice does not appear to be regarded as any evidence of Communist sympathies, or of any sort of "Red" twist in the minds of those householders. And if it *were* evidence of that, the Americans would know. They have a decided flair for that kind of thing.

XI

Hard and Soft

THE TRAIN TO MOSCOW leaves from the October Station, an imposing building which faces one of the busiest squares in Leningrad. They call it Insurrection Square, in remembrance of the decisive incident which took place there in the February Revolution, when the Cossacks went over to the people's side. In the midst of the square the massive equestrian statue of the Czar Alexander III still stands for an enduring remembrance of the tyranny which that insurrection at last overthrew. All those monuments of the Czars have been carefully preserved, and at first this seems a little surprising under a régime so eager to remake everything from top to bottom. One might rather have expected to find revolutionary monuments substituted for these Peters and Pauls and Alexanders sitting booted and spurred on their chargers. But with all the new Russia surging about their pedestals, one can perhaps divine a deliberate policy in this attitude of the Soviet power, as it were a kind of symbolic triumphing, and also a gesture of warning, as if those colossal images of a conquered arrogance were so many eloquent sermons on the text "Lest we Forget," a standing reminder to the new generations that as they are the heirs of that struggle, so also they are the only custodians of that deliverance.

It was raining when we arrived, but the spacious entrance-hall was brightly lit, and all the station was thronged. The waiting-rooms were, somewhat surprisingly, full of peasants, sitting on the benches or squatting on the floor, waiting patiently for their trains. Many of them were eating and drinking, some were playing cards or a game with coin

Hard and Soft

that seemed to resemble two-up. Others were fast asleep, with heads pillowed on their bundles. They had evidently come in from the country by all sorts of odd trains, and as it had been raining most of the day, they had pitched their camp in the station itself. We found that the Russian station generally partakes more or less of the nature of a caravanserai. In this country of great distances and few railways, peasants must almost always come a long journey to the station, and as many of them cannot read the official time-tables, and probably even those who can do not trust them too far, they make shift to arrive several hours beforehand, and then dispose themselves leisurely to take their rest and refreshment, not doubting that God will send a train sooner or later.

When we got to our own train we found that it also was crowded with peasants. It was a picturesque and rather exotic-looking crowd, a world of weather-beaten men with grizzled faces and thick rough beards, all clad in strange costumes, furs and sheepskins and shepherds' caps, leather jerkins and long cloaks, belts and sashes and long boots. Then there were the women with complicated peasant draperies, wooden shoes, and shawls over their hair. It was a throng that seemed to contrast strangely with the humdrum citizens in the streets of Leningrad. Those were all modern men, and like all city-dwellers they seemed more or less cut to a pattern. But these were different, they looked more like crowds out of old Russian story-books. There was something Oriental in their aspect; they made one remember that there was a Tartar strain in Russian blood.

There was not really so much of a crowd as it seemed at first, though the train was full enough. But the impression of multitude was partly due to the innumerable packages of every shape and size, containing, as it seemed, most of

This Russian Business

the worldly goods of the passengers. There were men, women, bags, boxes, swags, spades, saws, kettles, samovars, bundles, babies, hens, geese, ducks, and vegetables all jumbled up together. All of them that were capable of movement were moving about, and all in different directions; all of them that had voices were talking nineteen to the dozen, and whatever creatures could only quack or cry or chatter exercised those lesser talents to the utmost of their powers. It seemed like market-day in Noah's ark.

We sorted ourselves out more or less after the train started, and found out some things about Russian trains that we had not known before. We were travelling, as becomes the poor, third class. But in Russia you do not call it that. To begin with, there are only two classes. So there are in England, of course, and yet one of them is called the third class. But the Russian mind is not so subtle as that. However, the classes are not called first and second even there. They are known as "soft class" and "hard class." In hard class the seats are not provided with cushions. At night, however, mattresses and bedding can be hired from the conductor. The bedding was clean and comfortable enough. But the real hardness of hard class is not so much a matter of wooden seats, but rather consists in the fact that instead of sleeping in a separate compartment, four to a box (with a certain control of your own ventilation), you are in a sort of rather primitive Pullman car with fifty or sixty other passengers. Everybody had a place to stretch out, as far as I could see, but there was hardly enough fresh air for all those people to breathe; and after several hours with the windows closed, the slightly stale odour of human perspiration, flavoured with the exhalations from the onions that Ivan Ivanovitch had for supper, tends to produce an atmosphere rather too rich for Western nostrils. It wouldn't matter if the windows

Hard and Soft

could be opened now and then, even for a few minutes; but unless it were high midsummer, what Continental train had ever a window open?

I went to sleep and forgot it, but was wakened after an hour or two by somebody coughing. I was getting off again when somebody sneezed. It appeared that at least fifteen people had colds, and their throats and noses kept exploding on different notes and from different directions every three or four minutes. And there were other vague noises that seemed to become audible whenever there was a lull in the coughing. After half an hour of this kind of irregular sniping, I decided to wake up completely and look about me. That was one thing at least that nobody could prevent me from doing.

Augustus was sleeping the sleep of the just. I now realised that one of the lesser noises that had puzzled me was his snoring, a sort of low continuous rumble resembling the distant sound of cartwheels on a lumpy road. I wondered that he slept so soundly, but he was probably exhausted by a lengthy discussion he had had with a Russian fellow-traveller, a young woman whom her neighbours called Natalia, on the matter of these hard and soft classes on the Russian railways. That was just after we had settled down. Augustus was displeased with that nomenclature, or else pretended to be for the good of Natalia's soul. Why couldn't they call them first and second classes, as the very same accommodation used to be called before the Revolution? He said it was a mere pitiful pretence, a cheap evasion of the necessity for admitting that there were different classes in the people too, upper and lower classes, rich and poor, privileged and not privileged, even in this Communist paradise. Augustus almost always referred to Russia as "this Communist paradise" when he was displeased with the country. Natalia defended herself against

This Russian Business

this onset with considerable energy, but as I had heard most of the plaintiff's case before, I fell asleep in the middle of it.

I got up cautiously and looked out of the window. It was deep midnight, with a few white clouds floating in a clear sky. We were passing through high dark pine forests, with sometimes a patch of birches, and the full moon shone through the tree-tops. The ground was covered with white frost.

A baby started crying in the carriage. The mother wakened and comforted it. After a while she began to croon a lullaby. This wakened some more people, and after a certain amount of turning over and grunting several muffled conversations started, and began to thrive.

In the midst of this I heard a voice asking me if I had a match. It was Natalia. She was rolling her forty-second cigarette for that evening, and I could see that her eye was far too bright for slumber. We exchanged thoughts upon babies, coughs and pine forests. Then she asked me did I, too, think that there was just as much class distinction in Russia as in Europe, and that the Communists were themselves the new bourgeoisie, only under another name. This evidently referred to a portion of the argument which had gone on while I was asleep. I rather wanted to wake Augustus up and tell him to hold his own baby, but my better nature prevailed. I explained that I had my own doubts upon all those matters. It seemed fairly clear that in these trains, just as on ships and in theatres, you could still buy privileges, special treatment, for hard cash. In theatres the excuse we used to make on the ship is still partly available, namely, that from the way a theatre is built there must of necessity be better and worse seats. But with trains there is surely no such excuse. As far as the haulage is concerned, a carriage is a carriage. You can quite easily make all the accommodation of the same kind.

Hard and Soft

If you don't do that, if you maintain classes, and if you mean that to be a permanent arrangement, surely you ought to stop talking about equality, about classless societies and the abolition of privilege. You must surely admit at any rate that you have compromised, that you have admitted exceptions and limitations to those principles, that your society is a mixed one, with elements of privilege. And if you still claim that your social structure is essentially different from that of the rest of Europe, you must surely base this only upon the general preponderance of the principle and the atmosphere of equality, in spite of these not small exceptions which you admit, either temporarily or permanently, for some reason or other of practical convenience or public profit.

Natalia did not reply at once. She was busy rolling another cigarette. She lit it from the stump of the first, and began to smoke in a meditative sort of way. "I think it is not quite so," she said at last. "It is true: there is some compromise with the principle. There must always be compromise. We do not live otherwise, we poor human beings." She paused for a moment, and then went on, "It is not only the ships and the trains and the theatres. There are the living quarters too. Those are not very different now, not for the same kind of people. I mean single people and married people, and so on. But they will be different. Where I live in the northern quarter of Moscow, I have a small room, oh, very small. Just now I can have no other room, because there is a great shortage. But after all the communal houses are built, I shall be able to have a better room, if I pay more. Or two rooms, or three. But I shall not want three. And then there will always be dresses, more or less expensive. And cigarettes, and ornaments, and all kinds of things." She was silent. "Then you agree that there is no real equality after all?"

This Russian Business

I asked. "No," she said. "Not that. It is not so unequal as you say. We do not all want the same things. See, I smoke twenty cigarettes a day, perhaps thirty. When I can get them, that is. And I roll my own. It is cheaper. But you, you do not care to smoke much. Two or three cigarettes a day, is it not? Even if you have not much money, you can afford expensive cigarettes, when I cannot. Or if you smoke these," and she waved the one she held between two fingers, "you have more money left, and you can afford a better seat in the theatre. But because I choose to spend more money on cigarettes, and you choose to sit more comfortably at the play, we are not unequal, do you think? Or perhaps if we go by sea, you will buy the most comfortable berth, with large windows opening on the deck; and I, who do not become sea-sick, will save that money, and furnish my sitting-room at home, or buy the pictures that I want. It is not unequal. It is fair enough." It did seem fair enough at first. But I remembered that wages were not the same for all workers in Russia, even then, and I reminded Natalia of the late decree that (at least till the Plan was completed) these differences were to be increased, giving a much greater premium for skilled work. If everybody had as much money to spend as everybody else, no doubt it did not matter if it cost more to sit in the stalls than with the gods, and it was one's own fault if one travelled hard class on the railway. But if some had more money and some less, and money bought privileges, how could you say that all were equal, or that society was no longer divided into classes?" Natalia nodded. "It is true!" she said. "It *is* that which makes the difference. I do not know——" and there was a slightly puzzled frown on her brow, "I think perhaps it will not be so after the Plan is accomplished. We must have patience. Many things are necessary in a time of struggle that are

Hard and Soft

not desirable, things that can be done away with when the struggle is over. But we shall know in time. We will never tolerate classes. If things as they are do not give us equality, we will alter them. There is a way of working it out, and we shall find it. Do not fear!" Her voice had risen slightly, and her dark eyes had the light of faith in them. I seemed to recognise the authentic Bolshevik spirit. The words were the words of a bit of a wench smoking cigarettes in a railway train, but the voice was the voice of Russia. She was a daughter of the Revolution, and if she once came to the conclusion that the Revolution had not revolved far enough, she would make it revolve some more. You could never beat that spirit. And all at once I became full of doubts and hopes. I began to think that perhaps Augustus's hard facts never could be so hard but the fire in Russian eyes would melt them. What the reaction complacently calls "human nature" might be a refractory thing, and quite insoluble in theories, but were not human will and human passion a far stronger solvent?

Meanwhile—meanwhile Augustus is surely right. The problem of equality is not yet solved, whether it ever can be solved or not. On that field the battle is still a drawn one: the struggle stands at a pause. And yet, in spite of everything, I do not find it possible to doubt that there is a way, as Natalia says, and that Russia will find it sooner or later. And even if the way when found should turn out not to be identical in all respects with that written in the books of the doctrine, that would at least be a welcome proof that not even the dead hand of Marxist tradition can prevent the free development of Marx's ideas. And no doubt some forced interpretation *ad hoc* may always be found to save the face of orthodoxy. Or perhaps (who knows) by then the doctrine of literal inspiration may have definitely gone by the board.

This Russian Business

Yet even now it seems to me that there is an enormous difference between Russia and Europe or America in these matters. After all, those obvious inequalities are not the whole story. There is another side to it, a positive side. The superstructure of inequality may be left standing, at least in part, but the foundations have been shaken and undermined. The building now stands on sand, and no great push is needed to overturn it. For there are many kinds of equality between man and man, but the great and master kind, that on which all the others are based, is equality of opportunity. Even if some have more power or more money than others, it is clearly a considerable mitigation of that situation if all had an equal chance to win those privileges. In feudal societies privilege is frankly hereditary: opportunity does not exist for those outside the circle. The complacent theory of modern democracy, so-called, is that opportunity is equal for all, that every pit-boy may become a coal-owner, every office-boy a millionaire, and that every soldier carries a marshal's baton mystically strapped up somewhere inside his pack. But of course we know in our hearts that all that is sheer bunkum, the paltry patter of a confidence trickster. It is a matter of proportion, and the proof of the pudding is in the eating. The working classes in Europe are some eight or nine-tenths of the population, but is it really true that nine-tenths of the ruling classes at any given moment, nine-tenths of the bankers and financiers, nine-tenths of the House of Lords, nine-tenths of the coal-barons, the wealthy industrialists and the owners of landed estates are the sons of farm labourers, dock workers, coal miners, and the like? Do eight or nine-tenths of the stately country houses of England belong to men who were born in workmen's cottages? There needs no answer to such questions. The handicap of birth, environment, early training, education—

Hard and Soft

in a word, the handicap of poverty, is far too great. The most talented, the most egotistic, the least scrupulous, may break through; but the boy of average ability stays where he was born. The very exceptional pit-boy becomes Prime Minister now and then, but so does the mediocre aristocrat and the moderately talented industrialist, men who, if they had been born pit-boys, would have hewed coal until they died.

Well, is *that* any different in Russia? An hour or two later I asked Natalia what she thought about it, but only for form's sake. I knew by heart what she would say. "Of course!" she said gladly, rather relieved, I think, to find the conversation turning to something she could be sure of. "How could it not be different? We have no aristocrats, no bourgeois. Our directors and managers are appointed from the ranks: they have all worked with their hands. Not the foreign technicians, of course. But those will go back to their own countries when the Plan is finished. They have all contracts for so many years, and while they are here they train those who will take their places. And everybody has the same chance for that." It was Augustus who replied. He was not satisfied. He suggested that a higher-paid worker, or a technician, or a manager, could keep his son at school more easily than other workers, and so procure him advantages. "But of course not!" cried Natalia. "All the schools are free. The books are free. The training is free. The universities are free. A boy cannot work before the fixed age. And then he must work. He can still go to school, technical schools, night schools, workers' universities. But unless he works as well, he cannot go to these schools. How can one have more chances than another?" Augustus fired his last shot. "But if his father is a man of influence," he said, "there may be favouritism, surely. Human nature is human nature,

This Russian Business

even in a Communist paradise." (Natalia stiffened a little, as she always did when Augustus gave one of his pet phrases an airing.) "The people in the higher positions must be able to influence those below them, or even those on their own level. Suppose a People's Commissioner or a Party leader had a son at school. . . ." Natalia smiled. "They do sometimes," she said. "Stalin has a son. He did not get on very well at school. He is now apprenticed to an electrician in a little town in Georgia. But of course there might be favouritism, as you say. What would you have? Men are only human. If one sees it, one must protest. I do not think there is so much chance for favouritism as you think, though. It is rather difficult. Too many people would protest. But"—and she smiled again—"if you can think of any improvement, any arrangement which would make favouritism quite impossible, I am sure the Soviets would be glad to listen to you." Augustus subsided.

Many a true word is spoken in jest, and that somewhat frivolous suggestion often seemed to me to be in good earnest the key of the whole matter. There was always that positive spirit in these people's way of thinking, though it was not always expressed in words. Perhaps you are right, they seemed to say, we may not have done what we thought we had done. Perhaps we have only travestied our ideal. Well, if that is really so, we will try again. Next time we shall succeed, or the next. One always felt that the inexorable will was there, the obstinate creative impulse. And that seems to be the very essence of the Bolshevik spirit, the Bolshevik method. It is perhaps no guarantee of eventual success. But it does seem to be more or less a guarantee for the removal of all the accidental causes of failure. One sees the same spirit even in their periodic washing of dirty linen in public, at Soviet congresses, party congresses, and the like. They are not afraid to acknowledge

Hard and Soft

their mistakes. They do not cover up weaknesses and carry on, hoping that something will happen. Self-criticism with them is a virtue, one of the prime virtues. And when the fault, the mistake, the wrong turning, the waste of strength, is once plain to their eyes, there is no hesitation, no disconcerted lassitude, no false shame, no leaving the thing alone because change would be a confession of failure. The losses are cut at once, the new resolution is promptly taken, the false steps are retraced, the new effort begins. They find in 1921 that "war communism" has gone too far, and outgrown both their powers of control and their material resources. They scrap it. Lenin introduces the New Economic Policy amid the opposition or hesitation of half of his own party and the jeers of all the West. Much later, in 1929, the "unbroken working week" is introduced amid general applause and self-congratulation. But it turns out poorly; it will not answer. It is scrapped (except for a few industries) and the idea postponed. Something like equal pay is attempted—the principle, "from each according to his powers, to each according to his needs." It does not answer the present purpose; it endangers the sacrosanct Plan. It is scrapped; the time is not yet, we will return to it by and by. Always there is this eager opportunism, this stark realism, this sacrificing of every subsidiary aim to the single ideal, the one most urgent task. One thing at least its most vitriolic critics can never deny to the Russian Revolution, and that is its indomitable will to live, its passion for sheer survival. It is not in the mood to die, it lays eager hands on the future; alone among human societies of our time, it is conscious of youth, and rejoices in the zest of living. It has memory too, and tenacious purpose, in spite of defeats and tackings and manœuvres. Its opportunism is a temporary thing; it lays aside its cherished dreams to serve the moment's need, but that

This Russian Business

emergency once past, the work is taken up again where it was left off. The New Economic Policy was a halt, a strategic retreat, a temporary abandonment of positions. They looked on it so, they called it all those things, they used those metaphors. The Capitalist West said smiling: "They say so to save their faces, they cannot admit that Communism will never work, but it means that, and they know it; this is the beginning of the end; from now on they fail more and more; gradually, with some decent saving of face and adroit covering up of defeat, Russia will kiss the rod and enter the circle of Capitalist societies." The West was wrong. The retreat abruptly stopped. There was a rally, a new advance, the positions were recovered, a forward movement on a vast scale began, and began to triumph; it is called the Five Years Plan. It has had its ups and downs; the end is not yet; it is now the fifth year, and in some sense perhaps victory still hangs in the balance. Whether the thing can be done, whether it will endure when it is done is not yet clear. But what *is* clear even now is the tense will, the courage, the power to face facts, the dynamic, I had almost said the Titanic qualities of the reborn Russian people, and first and foremost of the chosen spirits, the much-wondered-at, much-hated Communist Party, that potent yeast which for now almost sixteen years leavens a hundred and sixty millions of men.

But as to this matter of equality, the School Teacher says that we all seem to have forgotten the most important thing. "All these people," she said, "obviously *feel* equal, and treat each other as equals. Even the very waiters and stewards haven't the slightest trace of servility, and nobody ever tries to treat them condescendingly. It seems to me that you all talk far too much abstract theory about whether these or those arrangements ought to produce class feeling or a sense of class distinctions, or what Augustus calls a

Hard and Soft

new snobbery." She says that, in fact, as far as she can see by using her eyes and ears, these things simply do not exist, so what is the use of trying to persuade Natalia that they logically ought to exist. There may be material inequalities, but those can be altered. The point is whether there is a spirit of equality, or not.

Perhaps that really is the point. In Russia and amongst Russians it is impossible not to feel that the spirit of equality is really there, in spite of some apparent formal contradictions. That is, within the Soviet system. It would be idle to consider in such a connection extraneous and diminishing elements such as private traders, Nepmen, kulaks, village moneylenders, or even foreign specialists. If the question is whether the new order now in process of construction has already created within itself social divisions analogous to the classes of the former régime, the fragments of the old régime, and any other foreign elements, must clearly be left out of account. And within the Soviet orbit it does seem clear that the psychological sense of class distinction is wanting, that social intercourse is free from any sort of snobbery, that there is everywhere in Russia, up to the present, a democratic spirit undreamed of anywhere else in the civilised world. And even on the ship and in trams and places of amusements, in all those places where the contradiction and the inconsistency seemed to be most glaring, it becomes evident on second thoughts that one's first impression was after all a rather superficial one. It is obvious that in all those places you can buy certain advantages or privileges, just as in any other country. But there is always a limit which does not exist in other countries; there are some things you cannot buy. And the things you cannot buy are of the same kind in all those places. You cannot buy the right to hold yourself aloof, to refuse to mix with the common herd, to consort

This Russian Business

only with those people who have bought the same privileges as yourself. If you travel first class on the ship, you buy a better cabin, but all the decks and all the sitting-rooms are as free to the third-class passengers as to you. In the train money will buy a more comfortable seat. But the waiting-room on the station is in common, and so is the refreshment room. There are no separate rooms for different classes of passengers, as in many countries of the West. At the theatre you pay more and sit in the stalls, or you pay less and sit perched in the gallery. But at the interval you all mix in the same foyer. And when one considers the nature of these differences, and the point at which the line is drawn in each case, one notices that, speaking by and large, it is the more private part of all these things which is sold at different prices according to quality, and that at the point where the clients mix with each other, and there comes the opportunity for social intercourse, the distinction ceases, the privilege is withdrawn. At that point all become equal, and money will no longer buy differential treatment. If your pockets are full of roubles, you can indulge yourself in all sorts of solid material comforts, but not in the subtler delights of social condescension.

Of course Augustus insists that the logical view is still the true one. So long as material privileges exist, he says, they will inevitably bring about psychological class distinctions, feelings of superiority and inferiority. This may be obscured for the moment by the general revolutionary atmosphere, just as to some extent class feeling in England was momentarily blunted during the war. But the time will come when the purchaser of privileges will condescend to ordinary people, and ordinary people will look up to them. Openly, that is; because, of course, that is how people must really feel even now, though they may still wear a

Hard and Soft

fashionable face of good fellowship till times become more settled.

But surely it is possible to exaggerate the psychological effect of all these material divisions. Even suppose one did have a society strictly and genuinely equalitarian, would there really be any logical reason why all cabins on ships and all seats in trains and all places at the picture show should be the same price? Surely Natalia is partly right when she says that we cannot all have the same thing. A berth or a seat is a commodity sold at a price according to quality; why must they all cost the same? Must every democrat pay the same price for his overcoat or his boots? Is utopian justice outraged if I buy margarine instead of butter, so that I may have strawberry jam instead of treacle? If a Communist Government sells beer, is it false to its principles unless it sells a small glass for the same price as a pint? But when I asked Augustus that, he said eagerly that that was the principle of supplying each man according to his needs, and that it was exactly what Communists *would* do. Well and good. But in that case it would seem that he should stop reproaching them for not doing it. We can't have it both ways. Not even the Bolsheviks (cunning though they be in all manner of evil) can be simultaneously absurd for doing something and inconsistent because they don't do it.

None the less, I suppose if one man has more money than another there is inevitably some tendency for his greater purchasing power in terms of luxury and privilege to make him feel uppish, and for the lack of such things to make other people feel downish. But there is a question how far that may be counteracted by other tendencies. I should think it will always be difficult for Prime Ministers to be haughty or condescending towards bootblacks, so long as the bootblacks persist in calling them "Comrade."

This Russian Business

Certainly it is not for nothing that in admittedly class-ridden societies the bootblack calls the minister "Sir," or "Excellency," or "Your Serene Translucency." So far Bolshevism does show a certain progress. Though perhaps the word "progress" begs the question. Augustus says it is retrogression. He approves of differences in rank and the outer distinctions that advertise them. He says that there is a social use both for actual subordination and for ceremonial outward contrasts, and that deep reasons of public policy justify the transparency of the minister and the relative opacity of the shoeblack. Still, this does not mean that equality is impossible, but only that it is all wrong. It seems to me too early to go into that, especially as our permission is not likely to be asked. These people are trying to make equality. It is at the very least an interesting experiment. Let us therefore encourage them to make it, if it can be made, and after that we can more conveniently discuss the question of whether or not they have made it back to front.

XII

Sermons in Stones

IT IS PERHAPS in Moscow that the visitor to Russia, the occasional hasty visitor, realises most vividly that he is both in a foreign country and in a new era of history. The half-Oriental aspect of the city makes one aware of Russia far more than the European streets of Leningrad, for Russia is not so much a foreign country as a foreign continent. The Russians have always spoken of "Europe" (as the Greeks do) as of an alien continent, meaning only the circle of Western lands, and until this hour the expression was full of meaning. Henceforward it may be still more so, but in a far different sense. The remnants of the feudal order have vanished into limbo; the mediaeval aspect, the Asiatic atmosphere are disappearing like smoke in the wind. Everything is being made modern, matter-of-fact, brand new, and not mainly on any European model. The material affinities of the new civilisation are rather to be found across the Atlantic, and it is no rash prophecy to say that in a few years' time the aspect of Russia will resemble America far more than the traditionalist West.

In Moscow too these changes go forward apace; the future presses hard upon the past, and the present has a confused and somewhat chaotic appearance. But this is mainly in the outer parts of the city; within the circuit of the ancient walls the beginnings of that transformation are less evident, and the city still wears the selfsame aspect that the slow centuries have given it, an aspect that often suggests Byzantium and the mediaeval East far more than the capital of a modern state.

And yet in Moscow there beats the very pulse of the

This Russian Business

proletarian Revolution; here, perhaps more than elsewhere, one is conscious of a new order and a different life. For here as elsewhere the revolutionary struggle has two aspects, the pursuit of riches and the pursuit of righteousness, the struggle to make backward Russia a wealthy modern state after the American model, and the struggle to make Russia into a Socialist State, something as different from America as could well be conceived. So there is, year by year, a change in the ideas and outlook of men, no less than in their occupations and their material works, and this change also is not without its outward signs and symptoms, accumulating ever since the overthrow of the Czars. These are the subtler elements in what one might call the revolutionary landscape, the symbols, the visible traces of the thinking and the passion which filled up those fifteen eager and stormy years.

The traditional centre of Moscow is the vast Red Square, lying under the high north-eastern wall of the Kremlin. It is more than a quarter of a mile from end to end. The imposing walls of the Italian-built mediaeval fortress, and the arcades and high regular fronts of the administrative buildings on the other side, form a striking contrast with the Russo-Byzantine riot of domes and spires in the two great cathedral-like buildings which close the square at either end—a contrast that vaguely recalls the Venetian piazza of St. Mark, where from three sides the stately Renaissance façades look somewhat severely across the quadrangle at that fantastic vision of Aladdin's palace which is the church of St. Mark. But in the Red Square only the southern of those two confections is really a cathedral; the other is the Historical Museum built in the nineteenth century (by an Englishman) to match it. There is perhaps a certain irony in the fact that the cathedral also has now become a museum. However, Moscow's need for

cathedrals does not remain entirely unsatisfied, for there are sixteen more of them in various parts of the city.

In the southern part of the square, towards the cathedral, is a round stone platform, which from ancient times has borne the name of the Place of Skulls. This was the place of execution, where from the time of Ivan the Terrible downwards political offenders were put to death, with the cowed populace watching from the lower level of the square, as it might be the pit of a theatre, while the Czar, if he had a mind, could view the last end of his enemies more conveniently from an upper window in the Kremlin.

The space along the wall right under the Kremlin battlements has become a kind of Pantheon of the revolutionary dead. Here are some five hundred graves of those who fell in the October revolution, and here also lie buried Sverdlov, the first President of the Soviet State, Vorovski, the ambassador murdered at Lausanne, and a few others.

High in front of all these memorials, directly under the Red Flag on the Kremlin dome, stands the red marble mausoleum of Lenin, where for these eight years his embalmed body has lain in state, exposed to the public veneration, in a crypt-like chamber below the monument. This spot is the very heart of Russia. It is an experience not easily to be forgotten, to come after dusk into the Red Square for the first time, and to see in front the high embattled walls of the Kremlin, flood-lit from the opposite side, with its turrets and central dome rising into the dark blue sky, and the gleaming scarlet of the Red Flag waving over all. And there below, dimly outlined in the shadow, is the mausoleum, with two Red Army soldiers at each gate, a perpetual guard of honour both by day and night. And stretching away southward all the length of the immense square is a deep column of men and women waiting their turn to enter the monument. There might be almost two

This Russian Business

thousand of them, and every night the same slow procession is there, forming themselves up in regular files, moving gradually forward, and always strangely silent. When you come in your turn to the outer gates, and then to the doors of the tomb, the impression of that silence is deepened by the aspect of the guards standing immovably at attention. They are almost the only guards one ever does see definitely at attention, and these were of an absolutely marble stillness, as if they were part of the fixed stone of the mausoleum. With suddenly bared heads the mourners enter, and then one by one, still in dead silence, they file down the passages into the tomb, pass slowly round the bier, and out by another door. Here are more guards, stationed in a kind of pit round the glass coffin. And there is Lenin in his proper flesh, lying back with his head on a pillow and hands crossed on his military coat, very calm and lifelike, as if merely at last asleep after much weariness, and with an extraordinary illusion of latent vitality. It is a marvel of the embalmer's art. And that sense of latent life, of the indomitable immortality of this man's spirit, is the strongest impression one gains, not only here in the solemn presence of the dead, while those daily thousands file past in a kind of rapt silence, devout and almost religious, not only here, and not only upon the soil of Russia, but wherever and however one encounters the labouring spirit of the Revolution. LENIN (which was not even his name) is cut in capital letters on the monument, that, and nothing else. It has become by now a sacred and dynamic name, a word of strange power in Russian minds. One might almost imagine *In hoc signo vinces* written under those five letters. There is surely hardly any other example of the imagination of a whole great nation being so preoccupied, so intoxicated with the memory of a single man; it is in a sense true, what their enemies say mockingly, that the Bolsheviks

Sermons in Stones

have deified Lenin—such deification as is conceivable where the deifiers are persuaded that there is no such thing as deity.

There are those who will have it that this posthumous veneration of Lenin, especially this tomb, is a masterpiece of subtle propaganda. No doubt that is true in a sense. Monuments are always that more or less. Tombs are not set up simply to house the dead; a wooden box will do that; there is always some thought of influencing the living and especially the generations to come. To call the effort to exercise such influence “propaganda” is new, the word is new, but the effort is always discernible wherever men thought the dead past worthy of commemoration for the sake of encouraging or instructing those who should inherit the times to come. Yet it is true that in our days this effort grows greater everywhere, and nowhere more than in Russia. Here propaganda is so constant and takes so many shapes, and in particular the mute propaganda of images and emblems, what one might call *symbolic* propaganda has been so effectively developed, that one instinctively reads propaganda into almost everything, and it may be that one sometimes suspects an intention to point a moral where in reality no such thing was meant. But perhaps it is not too rash to see some such intention in the deliberate juxtaposition of the emblems and monuments of the new order and the old in public places like the Red Square. For of the deliberateness there can be little doubt. Lenin’s tomb, the tombs of all those others, might have been set up anywhere. There was no special appropriateness in the Red Square. That was not the theatre of their deeds, or the special scene of their triumph. And if nevertheless this seemed to the Communists to be the one spot of all others for the setting up of this sanctuary of their faith, it was surely precisely because this one spot was the centre of that

This Russian Business

tradition with which all these dead were at mortal strife; what struck their imaginations was the visible challenge, the glove thrown down, the lifting up in high places of the signs of conflict. For there towers the Kremlin, with the Red Flag flaming above it, and in the square itself, under the walls of the fortress of the Czars, in front of the fantastic ancient cathedral, the plain solid tomb of the Socialist leader, the visible focus and symbol of the pulsing life of new Russia, of all those forces which overthrew both Church and Czar—and, across the square, that other high place, also a kind of focus in other times, where so often in the past the power and ferocity of the Czars used the last vain argument of despotism. It is hardly fanciful to see in this a wilful juxtaposition, a piece of tremendous rhetoric in the authentic revolutionary style—there, the monument of the destroying fury of reaction, its last card, its final effort to beat down opposition: here, in the tomb of reaction's latest victim, the triumphant answer to that effort, the assertion of the immortality of all the slain, the proof of the irrepressible, indomitable life that springs for ever from that blood.

There is a still more obvious propagandist purpose in the careful preservation and exhibition of the Czarist prisons. After the French had smashed the Bourbons they burnt down the Bastille. It was a satisfying gesture, it probably relieved their feelings, but in one sense it was a bad mistake. The art of revolution has made progress since then. The fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul in Petersburg is kept as a museum, and its dismal corridors, once carefully muted, now echo to the steps of a continuous procession of visitors who peer anxiously into the cells, examine the punishment chambers, and listen to detailed explanations of ingenious cruelties practised there, cunning and elaborate schemes to wear down rebellious wills, Machiavellian devices for the intimi-

Sermons in Stones

dation and enslavement of the human spirit. It surely has its effect—all that; it sinks in and leaves its mark, in a way it could never do if there were not present to the eye the mute unalterable witness of that forbidding stone and mortar. The gloomy impregnable walls, the narrow cells, the pallet beds, the spy-holes, the gratings, the isolation chambers, all these impress on the mind, in a way no mere words could do, the enormous weight of that force which for long generations held all Russia cowed and helpless. There are dungeons enough extant in Europe which the curious may inspect and shiver at, and the Russian prisons were no worse than the rest; the difference lies simply in the fact that the fortress of Peter and Paul is not, like the prisons of England or France or Germany, the crumbling theatre of far-off and half-forgotten misdoings; the Czarist tyranny belongs to these very days in which we live; the echoes of its infamy have not yet died away, at least for those who are old enough to remember what Europe was like before the war. As one listens to the patter of the interpreter, one is vividly conscious of this contemporaneity; one comes to this or that cell, and hears in matter of fact phrases that So-and-So lay here fourteen years, and that he is now living in Such-and-Such a street in Leningrad or Moscow. Of course many prisoners were there till the Revolution delivered them, and of these naturally a good part are still living; one can see that the Red Flag now floating above the fortress has for them and their relatives and acquaintances a special and poignant meaning. These have no need of propaganda to persuade them that the new is better than the old; as far as their influence extends they are themselves a living propaganda. And that influence must extend, directly or indirectly, much further than can be at all apparent to foreigners. Every man that ever knew or spoke with one of these

This Russian Business

ransomed captives, their friends' friends, all those who knew them even by name or sight, and finally all those who experienced, even as mere matter of daily news or passing curiosity, the tumults or political movements for which they suffered—to every one of those people (and between them they must include half Russia) the propagandist implications of these museum-prisons must come home with a particularly telling appeal. And then no doubt there may be moments of more immediate poignancy; it is still possible, it will be possible for many years to come, for the very inmates of former times to revisit the dreary scene—or if not they, then their nearest friends or relatives. It is easy enough to learn from a cicerone or a guide-book of past woes and to think but little of it, but it is a different matter if a man stands at your elbow and says, "Here my father lay till he rotted," or, "From that room my brother was led out to die," or it may be even, "I, I that speak to you, passed into that stone cage when I was young, and came out with these grey hairs."

But apart from these vivid personal contacts, every stone of that fortress is in itself, as it were, a page of Russian revolutionary history. When one knows its use, there is a certain poignant eloquence implicit in the very aspect of that triple oblong chamber crossed by two iron gratings, where (after many others) Lenin's mother, pale and desperate, saw her eldest son for the last time on the morning before he was hanged, and (as the ingenious rule was) they kept them each behind his own grating, two yards apart with the guards pacing between, and would not let the mother embrace her son, or even touch his hand. To this day they use a chamber like that in French convict prisons but not for those about to die.

Count it all up, and it must come to a good deal, the moral effect of all these memorials of the former time; it

Sermons in Stones

is probably well worth the paltry expense of keeping up a few acres of useless stone, and well worth the effort of self-control involved in refraining from gratifying the natural human taste for destructive rhetorical gestures, for pulling down fortresses so that not one stone remains upon another, and for making bonfires of the more combustible monuments of one's enemies.

The sparing of Czarist statues and monuments is perhaps a still more profitable piece of political wisdom. Museums are all very well, but people are not obliged to go to them, and the effect of preserving and labelling the instructive symbols of bygone misdeeds is a good deal wasted if a large proportion of the public persists in spending its half-holidays somewhere else. But a bronze tyrant on a charger in the middle of a city square is different. The political moral may be a shade less poignant, but at least the monument is bound to be seen; you are sure that sooner or later, and probably many times in the course of a few years, every mortal soul in that city will look at it. Especially if you smother it in scarlet streamers on all festal occasions, as they do.

In a certain sense the Russian propagandists are lucky in coming immediately after the Czars. The Bolsheviki are the protagonists of socialism, and the typical adversary of the Socialist idea is plutocracy, not absolute monarchy. Substantially and in principle, absolutism seems likely in the future, and in the world at large, to be a state of things quite irrelevant to that struggle, something like a freak candidate at a parliamentary election, whom everybody knows to be certain of losing his deposit. Yet in Russia there it is, or rather there it was, only yesterday, and upon its overthrow the present régime is built. Certainly a few months and a transitional régime intervened between the February and October revolutions, but the equilibrium

This Russian Business

of that compromise was shown even by the event to be unstable, and in any case the real tussle did not come till three years later, when the Red Army firmly based the Revolution upon the fair and square defeat of what in substance were plainly Czarist forces.

Now it is clear that an absolute tyranny is a far more terrifying alternative for propaganda to point to than any capitalist pseudo-democracy could ever be. When Socialists declaim against the horrors of Capitalism, the traditional answer is to make fun and to make believe, to pretend that there is really no such system as "Capitalism," that the term is a mere flourish, a piece of cant not far removed from nonsense, that we are obviously governed by democratic constitutions and ballot-boxes and such things, and that capitalists (if we smilingly concede the use of such a term) are no more powerful than carpenters. But you cannot dispose of emperors in that easy fashion. An avowed despot's government may be alleged by his supporters to be necessary, or benevolent, or divinely appointed, or otherwise admirable and desirable. But at least they can never deny that it is despotic. Autocracy, unlike the rule of capitalists and financiers, is obliged to come out into the open. Of course there have been a few instances to the contrary. Augustus Caesar pretended to be only a private citizen, and found it convenient as a rule to hide himself behind a popular constitution. But the vanity of modern potentates has rarely allowed them to exploit the advantages of dissembling their real power; they have usually been far more apt to make themselves a covert laughing-stock by flaunting pretentious titles, highnesses and majesties and mightinesses, which may be merely fatuous in powerless figureheads, so-called constitutional monarchs, but which in absolute rulers betray a boundless and dangerous insolence. The Augustan notion of monarchy was perhaps the man

Sermons in Stones

of iron; the mediaeval and modern notion has rather been the tin god. Tin gods may be ridiculous, but they are none the less dangerous for that. Nero was both in the highest degree, if history tells the truth; the strain of insanity so often inherent in the psychology of monarchs easily assumes monstrous proportions when absolute power finds its absolutism questioned or opposed. The Russian autocracy was a typical case in point. It was never more monstrous or more hated than in the fifteen years before its catastrophe. After discrediting its prudence and its power in one of the most shameful military failures in history, it encountered and suppressed the revolt of 1905, and its last significant act before the war in which it destroyed itself was the fearful repression of that rebellion, for the velleities of repentance, fiddling about with Dumas, setting up of sham constitutions, and such like feeble and spasmodic fooleries of the last years are hardly worth counting.

If they had been given half a century's grace, the Czars might in a certain sense have lived down those panic cruelties, but in less than ten years the beginning of the catastrophe was upon them. And naturally those three years of war did not help matters; a tyranny found unendurable even in time of peace is not likely to retrieve its reputation by dint of the slaughter of a couple of millions of men. The autocracy therefore ended on a note of ruthless reaction, of fury and massacre; when it finally met the Revolution its arms were still, in a none too figurative sense, dripping with blood.

In this there surely lies no small element of the successful appeal of Bolshevik propaganda. This, they can say, *this* is the historical alternative to the present régime. It is not even a question of Bolshevism or Western Capitalism. The gloved fist and the gilded chains are not in the fortunes of Russia. There is no middle way; whoever has the courage, let him

This Russian Business

choose. If you go out into the squares and pull down the Soviet power, there above you is the Czar on horseback, and to-morrow the Cossacks will ride you down. You may tear off the Red Flag from the Kremlin dome, and then the stones of Lenin's sanctuary will be taken away from the Red Square; but not the stones of that fatal platform on the other side.

It is a terribly telling piece of rhetoric thus written in symbolic stone where all who pass may read, even the illiterate countryman stooping under his bundles who comes to Moscow at dusk and passes by the Kremlin walls on his way to the Peasants' House. But is it true? If Stalin is tumbled down to-morrow, will some maniac Romanoff or the like really take his place? In Europe such a prediction would be an obvious *non sequitur*; there is by now too strong a tradition of mixed Governments, and the minds of whole populations have for generations been accustomed to political compromise. But here there is no such background; any midway course can draw no strength or sanction from the past; here legitimacy is the monopoly of absolutism. Joseph Conrad puts into the mouth of one of his Russian heroines a deeply significant saying: "The Western peoples have made their bargain with Fate; we need not envy them." Since then it has been put to the proof. Kerensky and his friends did envy the Western compromise, the comfortable half-way house; but Russia brushed them aside. This is the soil for extremes. There never was a bourgeoisie to speak of, nor any steadying middle interest; and a middle-class Government without a middle class, or with only a feeble middle class, is as artificial as a house of cards. If the present régime goes down, the pendulum of power will surely make that tremendous backward swing. There might be constitutions and Kerenskys for a few moments by the way, but it is hardly doubtful that all the weight of history would pass across them to the

Sermons in Stones

comparative equilibrium of an absolute government. A government of tense will on one side or the other,—that, or utter disintegration. There is no other fortune for Russia as Russia is now. She cannot bargain with Fate to-day any more than yesterday. To-morrow—yes, perhaps. Give the Bolsheviks fifty years, give them even twenty years more, let them industrialise and electrify the land, let them create not only a great proletariat, but also a great intelligentsia of their own, an aristocracy of skilled workers, managers, directors, technicians, professionals, and so on, strong enough to betray them, and to take advantage of the betrayal, and then let them fail! Then Kerenskyism and Western pluto-democracy may win. But not as things are now.

It is an illusion to which we are easily subject, to think of the continuance of the Communist power as being necessarily linked with its success or failure in the economic field or as a political experiment. No doubt the odds are so, that it will live if it succeeds, and die if it fails. But the odds are not overwhelming. The Bolshevik régime, like every other régime on earth, rests partly on force, and force may wreck it, especially if Europe or Japan makes secret or open war. That was tried once, and it failed, but it is not written in the stars that it will always fail. A rebellion of the discontented, backed by foreign money and furnished with foreign equipment, has always a reasonable chance in a period of transition. It is far too easy an assumption that all the dead civilisations died because they were ripe for death. As often as not they were simply murdered; they vanished from the world because of military failure, and nothing else. The Greece that Rome subdued was a finer thing than Rome, as the Romans themselves came to understand, and Rome herself was a better home for the human spirit than the kingdoms of the Vandals and the Goths. The Aztecs did not go down because their civilisation was a failure, but because they had no gunpowder.

This Russian Business

And the nation that rides upon the necks of Europe in the next war will be a set of degenerate maniacs who win because of their ingenuity in inventing, and their unscrupulous wickedness in putting into practice, some device or other for suffocating millions of human beings at a single stroke. So also the Bolsheviks, like everybody else, stand a very fair chance of being wiped out by a military (or chemical) catastrophe, even though their politico-economic experiment may show every sign of success. But one thing seems fairly clear. If Bolshevism dies, it has no heirs; the Revolution is left childless, and the succession must almost certainly revert to despotic rulers.

Yet perhaps if Bolshevism survives those violent chances for fifteen or twenty years, the odds are that it may win through altogether, in spite of the obvious peril to the Communist system from the directing hierarchy and the new intelligentsia. If the Communists successfully industrialise the country, if they make any sort of success of this tremendous business concern of "Russia Unlimited"—if they can give the people bread, even bread and jam, and with it peace, their prestige will be so enormous that it will be a most difficult matter to shake them. Once the great masses of the people have security and material welfare, they will not so easily suffer to be sacrificed the only system which has ever given them those things, and even if in those days they understand liberty otherwise than their rulers do, they are likely enough to seek the victory of their own conceptions from changes within the system, and not through attempts to destroy the system itself. But of course that also settles nothing, even if it turns out so. For although the consent of the governed, even the support of the governed, is a tremendous asset in the hands of any régime, it does not guarantee the régime against overthrow. Force and chance have still the last word.

XIII

The Changing Landscape

RED FLAGS on imperial fortresses, Communist Pantheons cheek by jowl with the secular monuments of despotism, May-day celebrations in palace squares, scarlet streamers on the statues of the Czars, museums in cathedrals, and a hundred other incongruous couplings of the same kind,—it is perhaps in these violent and studied contrasts that the Revolution discloses itself most vividly to the outward eye. These are more or less deliberate juxtapositions, full of an intentional suggestiveness, possessing a kind of ritual significance. Of course there is express ritual too, and plenty of it, celebrations, processions, festivals commemorating revolutionary events, even a Festival of the Revolutionary Dead. Sometimes the form of their ritual curiously recalls our own. The Russians do not hold their breath for two minutes on Armistice Day, but on January 25th all traffic in the streets stops dead for five minutes. It is the anniversary of Lenin's death.

But not all the marks of change are voluntary acts expressly designed to take the attention. Some of the most striking are by-effects of the central revolutionary change, often of a subtler kind, and not obvious to a stranger's eye until they are pointed out, but then most obvious. It is commonly said, for instance, that the Revolution has destroyed or is destroying the picturesque; and the more one reflects on this saying the more evident it becomes that it is true, at least in certain senses. Picturesqueness is a quality singularly difficult to analyse, at least when it is applied to anything but natural scenery. To call a thing picturesque generally means that you are looking at it very

This Russian Business

much from the outside, that you are indifferent whether it fulfils its own nature or satisfies its own purposes, or not. A fine building or a beautiful woman are things very different from a picturesque building or a picturesque-looking female. A building may be ruinous, and all the more picturesque for that, and the woman who strikes one as a picturesque creature may have neither happiness nor dignity in her face. In fact, there are surely some cases where a certain decadence positively helps the picturesque effect. It would be a curious speculation to consider how many "picturesque" scenes there are which depend for at least part of their effect on class differences, on ignoble passions, greed, lust, even on human misery. The picturesque cities are the cities with cramped buildings and narrow streets. Slavery is picturesque, and so is the contrast of the silk hat and the workman's blouse; is not the courtesan sometimes picturesque in the highest degree? Consider the overlaboured Italian peasant—the most picturesque, the most tragic of mortals. Peasants everywhere are so, from English Hodge to the Russian moujik, and always one ingredient of their picturesqueness has been their poverty; they are picturesque because they are hard-bested, and not in spite of it. As soon as you take the load off a man's back, he fatally becomes less interesting to painters and tourists; there is no dilettantism of human happiness. No gathering is more picturesque than a market, almost any market; but how comes that to be so? Does it not arise in the last resort from the pressure of need on all those traffickers, the conflict of a hundred covetous wills, the babel of many tongues, the anxious chaffering for half-pennies, amusing to the idle passer-by, but often a matter of deadly earnest to those concerned. And even apart from the quality of the human energy which thus expresses itself, its very multifariousness helps to make the picturesque

The Changing Landscape

atmosphere; it is the jingle and the disorder, the hurly-burly and the to and fro of all this ebb and flow of human effort; it is picturesque partly because it is without a plan.

It is probably true that to the idler and the aesthete, the globe-trotter and the mere sensuous spectator (and all those qualities are in all of us more or less), a certain kind of interest is dying out of Russian life and landscape. The picturesque and the characteristic, the exotic touch, the splash of local colour, the Oriental tinge, the mediaeval atmosphere, all that is surely and not slowly passing away, and most of the change is directly traceable to the Revolution. The process is there before one's eyes; the land visibly changes under the sunlight, even as one's glance falls on it for the first time. The hovel and the narrow street give way to the skyscraper with a thousand windows. The country costumes become out of date. The small traders are forced out of business; the fairs and markets shrink, the noise of chaffering dies down in the streets. Quaint little shops and stalls on the pavement give way to department stores and co-operative warehouses. The lines of traders' booths under the Chinese Wall in Moscow grow shorter year by year; they tell you there were formerly so and so many; and you cannot find the half. The trams are stuffed and packed, but the *izvoschik* with his ancient nag and crazy carriage are like a dwindling and half-forgotten survival from a different world. The palaces have ceased to look palatial, as palaces will when you turn them into museums. The churches have still some tinge of Byzantine splendour, but the coloured and gilded domes seem to have lost a good deal of their original brightness, and even the interiors often show signs of neglect and decay. Evidently that stream of money which kept them showy and splendid tends to dry up in these days of mere voluntary contributions, for the Socialist State spends no money on churches,

This Russian Business

except where it has here and there taken them over as museums or the like, and thus saved them from the general dilapidation. The Byzantine quaintness still hovers about them, the mixture and exaggeration of styles has still its peculiar appeal, and the characteristic Russian dome still looks like a squashed onion, gilding or no gilding. But the endless repetition, the poverty of constructive imagination, the profusion of meaningless architectural detail, and the wallowing in extraneous ornament—what one might call the toy-shop motif, the almost comic jumbling of disparate elements which reminds one so forcibly at times of a curio bazaar—all that atmosphere of tawdriness and questionable taste, which was hidden and dissembled under the wealth and splendour of former days, seems to become keenly accentuated when poverty begins to give the whole collection a kind of threadbare look.

But where the church decays, the factory springs into life; and factory architecture may be impressive, convenient, hygienic, even beautiful, but it is never specifically picturesque. And factories grow apace; even now the factory is not only the actual basis of the new Russia; it is also one important element in the visible physiognomy of its cities.

Nor is it only the cities where picturesqueness seems to be dying; the country, so far as man and his works are an element in the landscape, is changing too. You can still see here and there a hand-plough, and peasant women dragging it while the peasant walks behind, and here and there are little plots and criss-crosses of farmland, ditches and hedges and corners, all lying higgledy-piggledy as if someone had forgotten to clear it away. But the collective farms are changing all that, a tremendous change, probably unexampled in history, a vast agrarian revolution pushed through in a couple of years by sheer obstinate will power. The miserable little allotments are thrown into the general

The Changing Landscape

communal hotchpotch, the hedges and ditches and patch-work fields are melted together as if by magic. Machinery rules this new world. The hand-plough and the flail vanish into the limbo of half-forgotten things. Even the horse tends to disappear. The tractor is master of the field. And what a field! Where the small peasant farmed his five or six or ten acres, the collective farm which he helps to work, and out of the profits of which he lives his more spacious life, runs into thousands, hundreds of thousands, even millions of acres—a scale hardly known hitherto even in America.

So all over Russia the picturesque gives place to the convenient, and tradition and mediaevalism are buried under the shavings and shot-rubbish of the building of the modern world. In this there is surely neither anything strange in itself, nor yet anything which marks out that process as a characteristic result of revolutionary doctrines. In all this the history of contemporary Russia is the history of all the countries of the earth. All the nations go that self-same road, and if America goes first, it would be hard to name a state, however obscure or backward, which does not somewhere or other fall raggedly into line. Certainly in Russia there is one thing strikingly different, namely, the tempo, the rate at which the change takes place; there is the prevailing sense of an immense urgency, the continual consciousness of a race against competing forces, the revolutionary energy which deliberately organises and quickens the march of a progress perhaps at some time inevitable, which lays violent hands on the sluggish future and compresses the industrial history of whole generations into a matter of months.

XIV

Russia and the Church

IT IS QUITE obvious that, in a general way, the Christian clergy and the Socialists do not like each other very much. It is hard to say who started it. Of course the Church now complains that the Russian Government persecutes the clergy, and no doubt the complaint is more or less justified, although one cannot help feeling that the clergy in these days are sometimes a shade too ready to cry out on persecution the moment the ecclesiastical body ceases to be the spoilt child of the State. But the quarrel is much older than the Russian Revolution. It is now a good forty years, for instance, since Pope Leo the Thirteenth rather rashly went out of his way to publish that famous encyclical in which he laid it down as a matter of obligatory doctrine that Socialism was immoral, and ought to be suppressed. And if he took no active steps to suppress it or persecute it, it seems fair to suppose that that was only because the Temporal Power had long since followed the Inquisition into an irrecoverable past. Not quite irrecoverable, of course, because in these days there is the Vatican City; but that territory is hardly large enough to offer much scope for persecution, especially as the Italian State has for some years been itself addicted to Communist-hunting, and probably by this time the quarry has grown rather scarce and shy, at least in the immediate neighbourhood of Rome. Still, it is pretty safe to say that if you want a licence to sell tobacco or peddle curios within the limits of the miniature Papal dominion, you had better keep your Socialist principles dark, if you have any. And that is about as far as any reasonable person could expect Papal persecution to go, under all the circumstances.

Russia and the Church

You can't have *auto-da-fés*, at this time of day. And even if you could, a politic pontiff might well hesitate to choose this particular heresy for an example.

For sound though Leo's pronouncements might no doubt be from a purely doctrinal point of view (being indeed guaranteed from error by the well-known infallibility of the Popes), there can be little doubt that politically the great encyclical was a bad mistake. The Pope quite evidently believed that Socialism was at, or had passed, its zenith, and that a resolute push would be enough to give the decisive topple to a doctrine which, besides being contrary to the Divine will and to revealed religion, was in the long run likely to be politically dangerous to the power, the prestige, and even the possessions of the Catholic hierarchy. But this opinion turned out to be ill-founded. The pestilent doctrine continued to flourish, in fact it grew so far and so fast that orthodoxy must often have wished that it had never been irrevocably declared to be pestilent, since the embarrassed clergy found themselves in the position that the obligatory defence of the indiscreet encyclical tended to weaken their already precarious hold on the more radical portion of their congregations. Agile commentators and apologists did what they could to soften the blow, to explain away the encyclical, or rather to pare down the angular, uncompromising document into some manageable shape, but the results were not very satisfactory. The fact remains that the Church had openly taken sides on a political question, had allied itself in the most definite manner with one party against the other. It had taken that risk before, and suffered no great hurt, but this time it seemed to have picked the wrong horse.

Of course only the Roman sect was formally compromised by the encyclical, but for one thing that communion included a good half of all Christendom, and then the encyclical did not stand alone. Every one of the ecclesiastical organisa-

This Russian Business

tions had committed itself more or less, though not always officially or publicly. It was sufficiently obvious that the clergy of all denominations everywhere were strongly anti-Socialist, an antagonism always very thinly veiled, and often not veiled at all. There were occasional exceptions. Socialist curates, radical vicars, bishops who flirted with liberal opinions. But these were few, and whether justly or unjustly, their good faith was generally doubted by both parties.

On the other side of the fence there was perhaps an equal hostility on the whole, but it was of a more confused and heterogeneous nature. This difference was partly due to the varying degrees in which working-class movements in different countries, and even their sects and branches in the same country, were tinged with Socialist doctrine, but I think partly also to a certain hesitation and variance even amongst the leaders upon the question whether it were more politic to be anti-Church out-and-out, or to be for the present merely anti-clerical, carefully separating the irrelevant question of religious faith from the burning issue of clerical antagonism, and disclaiming any desire to meddle with religious matters, if only the ministers of religion could be persuaded to mind their own affairs.

This hesitation was natural, if only because there were certain passages in Christian history which seemed (not indeed to Marxian theorists, but to more opportunist and for that time more practical leaders) to be well worth exploiting for propaganda purposes. For in spite of every attempt on the part of the comfortable orthodox to explain it away, the telling, the damning fact remained that the Christian Church itself was originally a Communist organisation. And then there were minor tit-bits for propaganda. There was the fact that Christians were recommended to sell all that they had and give the proceeds to the poor, a drastic but picturesque course of action to which they

Russia and the Church

were supposed to be moved by the reflection that camels could as easily pass through the eye of a needle as rich men into the Kingdom of Heaven. The extreme embarrassment of the clergy when trying to bowdlerise all this tactless doctrine of primitive times sufficiently to conciliate the favour of the rich upon whose largesse the Church had come to depend, was a tremendous asset to the Socialist anti-clerical of the nineteenth century, and to many of these propagandists it seemed a thousand pities to expressly deny or directly attack the authenticity of the authority of a doctrine which caused such intense discomfort to the complacent modern cleric. They rather enjoyed saying, in effect: yes, your religion is a very good thing; we agree that every word of it is true; but why not carry it out, just for a change? When are you going to begin this business of selling your goods in order to clothe the poor? But of course the authentic Marxists, those rigid conscientious men, despised all these pettifogging tactics. They made no concessions to human weakness, and burnt no incense before traditions which they did not believe in. They found themselves attacked by the clergy; they attacked the clergy in turn, and no considerations of opportunism or popularity withheld them from expending a portion of their aggressive zeal on the religious principle itself, utterly irrelevant though that was to the matter at issue. They were obliged to be anti-clerical; they often afforded themselves the luxury of being atheists.

In Russia itself these things were still mute and implicit; where the established Church is a mere department of the general government, there is no great scope for change or variety either in the attitude of the religious department towards revolutionary movements, or in the attitude of revolutionaries towards the official clergy. The bureaucracy and the hierarchy are too intimately fused together for any

This Russian Business

pretence of impartiality by the clergy as between the established order and its enemies. And on the other hand, revolutionary movements which are compelled to struggle for very life with open tyrannous force have naturally less attention to bestow on the question of their attitude towards the psychology of humbug. For "humbug" is of course the word that precisely sums up their implicit emotional bias in these matters.

So matters stood, more or less, when the Revolution turned the whole world upside down. In a sixth part of the world Socialism not only became the established order, but showed a distressing capacity for maintaining itself indefinitely in that situation. This of course was exactly the state of things the chances of which Leo the Thirteenth in particular, and the Christian clergy in general, had too rashly discounted. Plainly it would have been wiser to hedge. As it was, they were caught napping. For the Churches in Russia, and especially the Orthodox Church, the dilemma was acute. Privileges, property, revenues, everything vanished overnight. There remained of course, even in adversity and disfavour, the guiding principle of rendering unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, of knuckling under to the established authority, and bartering submission for tolerance. That of course would have been politic, though distasteful. But for many centuries the clergy, after due obeisance to Caesar, has been largely and steadily rewarded by Caesar's bounty. Now from the very beginning it was quite clear that this new Caesar was not bountiful. It is not surprising if the hierarchies persuaded themselves that power so definitely divorced from largesse could hardly be a power of the sacred kind, to which our temporal obedience is commanded; and doubts of that kind lead almost inevitably to political intrigues. The trials of metropolitans and archbishops for treason, and all the

Russia and the Church

agitation and excitement which accompanied those events, led naturally to sympathetic action by the clergy of the West; there was a furious outburst of anti-Bolshevik propaganda which probably relieved the feelings of the European clergy very considerably, but which seems to have rather increased the embarrassments of their Russian colleagues. At last some sort of *modus vivendi* was patched up, and at any rate a large portion of the Orthodox clergy passed under the yoke and become reconciled, at least outwardly, to the existing régime. But it is obvious that neither party has forgiven the other. And of this the Communist anti-religious propaganda is one of the most obvious signs.

It is only against that historical background, in fact, that the Bolshevik anti-religious campaign becomes intelligible. If things could be taken at all at their face value, there would be something inexpressibly comical about a hard-pressed, hard-worked, matter-of-fact revolutionary administration wasting time, money, and energy on the propagation of its own academic views as to the existence or non-existence of God, or the degree of historical value which ought to be attributed to the Acts of the Apostles or the Lives of the Saints. And if it were true that the Bolshevik Government went on from that harmless though somewhat frivolous employment to harass and persecute, to exile and imprison, even in odd cases to shoot their ecclesiastical antagonists simply out of pedantic resentment at their continuing to hold different views about these abstruse philosophic or antiquarian questions—if that were true, we should obviously pass out of the regions of farce into those of sheer doddering insanity. But of course it is not true. The contest is a contest for power, not a dispute between erudite savants about philosophic dogmas or historical opinions. It is the old struggle between king and

This Russian Business

priest; it is the secular power against theocracy. The prize at stake is not the advancement of abstract opinions, it is the winning and holding of authority, the control of political allegiance, the power to command the support and obedience of the common people.

And yet there is one enormous difference which marks out this, the most modern form of that age-long struggle, from all the shapes it took in former times. The new and strange thing, from a historical point of view, is this very anti-religious propaganda of which we hear so much. When the Roman Empire persecuted Christianity, it did not indulge in anti-Christian propaganda, nor was that method made use of in any real sense by the persecuting Governments of the Middle Ages, or by the Protestant and Catholic Governments since the Reformation. All these Governments haughtily commanded their subjects to believe thus and thus, or not to believe (or at any rate profess) other less acceptable doctrines. They did not as a rule attempt to persuade them. Persuasion would in fact have been considered beneath the dignity of the ruling powers, since it obviously implies an admission of liberty to disobey. In fact, it is quite clear in principle that persecution and propaganda are in their nature incongruous; whatever field is effectively occupied by the one, the other must of necessity be excluded from it for the time being. You *may* of course threaten a man and argue with him at the same time, but if you do, you stultify both those efforts; for it is obvious that you yourself have only a very limited confidence in the efficacy of either of them.

A middle course is logically possible, since the people who hold the opinions the Government dislikes are divided into two classes, the shepherds and the sheep. You may, that is, persecute the priest, while you proselytise his flock. In a certain sense no doubt this is what has actually

Russia and the Church

happened in Russia. It is obvious enough that no pressure of any compulsory kind is put upon the people to alter (or rather abandon) their religious opinions, but they are besieged and surrounded by every kind of propagandist appeal, positive and negative, direct and indirect. The priestly class, on the other hand, whose conversion can scarcely be hoped for, are at least negatively persecuted, in that their State stipends are wholly withdrawn, and it is obvious that so far as the propaganda is at all successful their receipts from voluntary contributions are also likely to become scanty and precarious. It may be true that nothing prevents a pope from working for his living and preaching in his spare time, but in spite of Tolstoi such evangelical counsels have never yet made any very general appeal to the members of the priestly order, or of any other order. To refuse to pay a man a salary for doing something which you do not want him to do may hardly seem to deserve the name of persecution, but it is obvious that under given conditions it may produce some of the same results. And there seems in fact to be very little doubt that a considerable number of parish priests have become sufficiently discouraged by the prospect or experience of poverty to give up the unprofitable contest, and either to turn wholly to some other means of making a living, or even to leave the country.

The governmental (or party) propaganda is in some respects a very curious and interesting phenomenon. It is commonly referred to, both in Russia and abroad, as an anti-religious propaganda; there are anti-religious museums, anti-religious posters, anti-religious films, wireless broadcasts, lectures, pamphlets, even school-books. But on closer examination the term "anti-religious" turns out to be a rather clumsy and even an ambiguous description. For in the stream of propaganda two different tendencies

This Russian Business

are clearly to be distinguished. One of them makes a direct or indirect attack on supernatural doctrine, and this is obviously aptly enough described as anti-religious. The other ignores the doctrinal question mainly or altogether, but makes a direct and generally an extremely vigorous attack on the morals, the disinterestedness, or in plainer words the honesty, of the priestly class. And this tendency would perhaps be better called anti-clerical, in the interests of clear thinking. Now it is the anti-clerical propaganda which enormously predominates, and this is of course exactly what might have been expected, having regard to the origins and nature of the struggle. In fact, it is hardly too much to say that the specifically anti-religious propaganda is on the whole purely incidental and auxiliary to the attack on the vested power of the clergy, and that the criticism of dogma, so far as it exists, is little more than a stick with which to beat the dogmatists. And here again is made manifest the fundamental difference between this and most previous historical controversies on a large scale (at least since Roman times) between the State and religious bodies. When a Catholic Government persecuted Protestants, or an Anglican Government Nonconformists, the ministers of the persecuted sect were always treated with especial rigour. But in those cases the Government attempted to destroy the influence of priests for the ulterior purpose of detaching the congregations from certain beliefs, or attaching them to others; whereas in modern Russia the Government attempts to weaken the belief of the population in certain doctrines (where it does so at all) for the ulterior purpose of destroying the influence of the clergy. There are fairly large reservations to be made on both sides of the comparison, but substantially the distinction is there.

There is in Russia a good deal of very vigorous propaganda expressly directed to show that the clergy of various

Russia and the Church

sects and religions (for Christianity has no monopoly of the attack—one has to remember that large populations in Russia are Mohammedan, Buddhist, and what not) are merely corrupt self-seekers, leading idle and luxurious lives at the expense of the deluded workers. One very typical cinematograph film shows Russian Orthodox clergy and monks engaged for five reels in the elaborate management of bogus miracles, and afterwards gloating in secret over the plentiful contributions of money obtained as a result of the devotional fervour induced thereby in the faithful flocks. Nor is the general atmosphere of the so-called anti-religious museums of a very different kind. One of the most characteristic motifs in the strange jumble of exhibits in the museum in Leningrad which used to be St. Isaac's Cathedral (a motif often recurring in other museums) consists of jibes at the fat revenues of the Pope and the huge salaries of various bishops of the Church of England, the state and splendour of these dignitaries being pointedly contrasted with the poverty both of the Founder and of the flocks whom (it is suggested) they hypocritically affect to serve. Other sects and religions are not neglected, neither the living nor the dead, for the museum has a historical section. Neither Islam nor ancient Egypt escapes criticism, nor the Delphic oracle, nor the Sibyls, nor the medicine-men of the Congo. But the salaries of the English bishops might almost be said to be the *pièce de résistance*. That, with the Papal revenues and the miracle-mongering at Russian shrines, were evidently thought to be the most impressive scandals of that order which were conveniently available for propaganda purposes.

In one form or another the whole propaganda is permeated by this accusation of trading in holy things, of bad faith and dishonesty on the part of the clergy; it is continuously and mercilessly insisted that priests all over

This Russian Business

the world are kept by the rich at the expense of the poor, that they are the servants of the rich, that they always take the side of the rich against the poor, and that they consistently use imposture and mystification for the purpose of keeping the masses ignorant and subservient to the interests of the propertied classes, to which classes they, the clerics, belong, or of which they are the hangers-on. That sort of thing fills all the foreground of the propaganda.

Now that is obviously not quite what is suggested by the term "anti-religious propaganda." It is anti-Church propaganda, anti-clerical propaganda; it consists predominantly of the personal attack and the *argumentum ad hominem*. And one cannot help suspecting that this accounts for a certain amount of the furious anger which the propaganda arouses in clerical circles in Western Europe. It is partly a matter of esprit de corps, of caste solidarity. It is only human for clerics to be even more annoyed at attacks on their own good faith than at attacks on the validity of their teachings. If you corner your solicitor at the club and try to prove to him that the law of England is all wrong, he will most likely bear with you tolerably well. But if instead of doing that you argue that all solicitors are scoundrels, the chances are that his replies may have a more acrid flavour. And although clergymen may upon the whole be meeker men than lawyers, it seems probable that there are times when even they are not exempt from motives of personal resentment.

The purely anti-religious propaganda, such as it is, seems to be addressed more to the younger generations, a tendency which of course it shares with the religious propaganda in other countries. It begins at a very early age. I have before me a spelling-book with pictures intended for village children between the ages of five and eight. All through its sixty-odd pages the study of the arts of reading and writing

Russia and the Church

is combined with the inculcation of edifying matter of one sort or another, exhortations to help mother, to wash oneself properly, to chew one's food carefully, to collect old cornsacks to help with the harvest, and so on. Then there are little homilies on collective farms, the virtues of co-operation, the village festivals, the dignity of labour; and little conversational bits about natural history, picture shows, telling the time, the seasons, carpentry, and what not. So far nothing much that might not be found in many a primer in the West. But amongst the rest there are two references to the religious controversy. The second in order runs textually thus:

AWAY WITH IKONS

We have no ikon at home;
Have you, Sonia?
No, we have no ikon either.
We have a shelf in the corner
(where the ikon would normally be),
And on the shelf is the radio.

Mamma, take away the ikons;
We do not need ikons;
Away with ikons!

And above the print is a picture of the shelf and the radio set, with two infants seated on a form beside it, receivers to their ears, and a blissful smile on their faces.

Now that, for what it is worth, is clearly pure anti-religious propaganda. It does not contain anything expressly controverting Christian doctrine, but the implication, the suggestion, is obvious. The object is definitely to accomplish what the other party in these matters describe as "poisoning the minds" of the children. Poisoning the minds of the children means, of course, teaching them what you believe, and failing to teach them what I believe.

This Russian Business

The other piece of religious (or anti-religious) instruction is on the opposite page. It follows after several little bits about the good points of collective farms, and is accompanied by a picture showing the village hall with an exhibition of very prosperous-looking vegetables and other farm products, and peasants looking on. One grey-bearded moujik, gazing in some amaze at these phenomenal pumpkins and carrots, is evidently intended to represent the hitherto uncollectivised peasant, the so-called "Single-Jack" who still hesitates to join the "artel." The hall has two posters displayed on the wall, with lettering in large print. The first runs, "If you wish to increase your harvest, join the collective farm!" The second is, "Collective Labour and Science will give the harvest!" The text below the picture runs as follows:

OUR HARVEST

Do you want to increase the harvest? then help
the collective farm in its work!

Our harvest is not from God.

There is no God.

If you wish to increase your harvest, join the
collective farm!

Now here in one sense you have anti-religious propaganda at its purest, at its most naïve. This is the first beginning, the original germ to be introduced into the infant mind. From this a whole system of propaganda is to grow. And already there is no beating about the bush. Doctrine is definitely tackled, and atheism is boldly affirmed as an article of faith. At first sight it would seem that the ordinary political pre-occupations have been entirely lost sight of, and that this is an excursion into the realm of pure philosophy; the children are being taught atheism exactly as Italian children are taught Catholicism or German

Russia and the Church

children Lutheranism. No doubt, too, this might easily be justified. As the Western parent so often says, with a slightly worried accent, "One must teach the children something, you know." Which is generally an explanation of the children being sent to Sunday School, although the parent resolutely refuses to go to church. And if we thus use the phrase to justify teaching children what we do not believe ourselves, we can hardly refuse the Russian teachers the same justification for teaching what they do believe.

But I think a more careful examination of the passage quoted shows all that to be rather beside the mark. For the context shows pretty clearly that the dogmatic sentences are after all propaganda, and not philosophy. Moreover, the propaganda is not of a purely religious kind, and even so far as it is religious it does not tackle the question of doctrine quite so fairly and squarely as it seemed to do. For it is peasants who are addressed, and the children of peasants, and the whole point is the choice suggested between two alternative methods of assuring or improving the yield of one's crops. The first method is to trust in God, to venerate ikons, to pray. The other is to join the collective farm, to use applied science, to use machinery, to co-operate. The propaganda is first and foremost a propaganda for the collectivisation of the land; the main inducement is the promise of better crops. And then the competing alternative is cried down; the God who is denied is the God of the harvest. Now the God of the harvest is a deity to whom a good part of the Christian world still pays some occasional lip-service, but it is hardly too much to say that prayer, as a means of effectively regulating rainfall and drought, is no longer much relied on by the more successful amongst European and American agriculturists. In Russia the theory probably holds its ground better; it would be rash to suggest that this propaganda merely beats the air.

This Russian Business

proper sense of the words; the very idea of such a thing betrays a lack of the sense of proportion.

Certainly there are, none the less, a class of critics who are definitely persuaded that something far deeper and more dire than a political motive may be discerned in the Bolsheviks. There are clerics, and perhaps even pontiffs, who in all good faith go so far as to attribute to the Communist leaders something very like diabolic possession, and a definite traffic with the powers of evil for the purpose of afflicting the Church. This view is of course logical enough, but the vast majority of people do not find any sense in it; not because they are unwilling to think so much evil of the Bolsheviks, but simply because they do not believe in the possibility of that kind of evil. And when once explanations of that apocalyptic kind are excluded, it becomes evident that the conditions for an anti-religious animus on a large scale and of an emotional nature, in other words, for such an animus as would be necessary to give body to anything like a persecution for conscience sake—that these conditions simply do not exist. After all, you cannot very well have the *odium theologicum* without a theology. Mere agnosticism cannot rise to those heights of hatred which engender persecution, and Russia is essentially a secular and agnostic state. No secular power will ever persecute any religion for religion's sake, unless in the interests of a rival religion. The Roman Empire persecuted, when it did persecute, mainly for political reasons. Yet it is clear that in that case it might conceivably have been otherwise, since there was in Rome an official State religion, even though it may have been a purely Roman religion, incapable of missionary zeal, and with hardly any trace of fanaticism. In Russia, on the other hand, the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, and the other existing religions of the land, have still a monopoly of supernatural doctrine, and are likely to have.

Russia and the Church

There is nothing to arouse fanaticism or hatred on the part of the State or its governing classes against these religions, as religions. There is so far no State religion, no rival candidate for their influence over the purely religious part of men's minds, no competing scheme of salvation in the world to come.

But as far as these religious bodies are organised on a political basis and pursue political ends, the situation is obviously a very different one. There, the State's own field is trenched upon, the motive for hostile action is no longer wanting; and so long as the different churches lie under suspicion of political conspiracy, or even of fostering counter-revolutionary sympathies among their flocks, it needs no prophet to foretell the continuance on the part of the ruling power of an anti-clerical propaganda, or even (according to the sharpness of the need, or the imagined need) an anti-clerical persecution.

But of course I have forgotten one motive, other than the political motive, which might conceivably move a Socialist Party, perhaps even a Socialist Government, to active and emotional hatred of religion, quite apart from the political attitude of the priesthood. There is always the principle contained in the famous, or infamous, axiom that "Religion is the opium of the people," meaning, in a crude paraphrase which will do for the present purpose, that religion as administered to the masses makes people seek their salvation in the hereafter instead of applying their energies to setting right the present world. This is admittedly a theme which is constantly harped on both in Russia and out of it, and there is obviously a certain amount of truth in the jibe that Socialists wish to abolish religion just in order to leave the people more time to think how badly off they are under Capitalism. But of course that will hardly do where the Socialists are themselves in power. In that case,

This Russian Business

by hypothesis, they have already abolished capitalism, at least as a dominating political force. They themselves are now the defenders of the *status quo*. It is they who are now likely to be blamed, justly or unjustly, for whatever presses upon the people; and it is against their own tents that any wind of change will blow. And if religion really benumbs people's faculties in the way suggested, it might with some plausibility be argued that the Bolsheviks ought in the interests of political stability (which is now their own interest) to encourage it as much as possible, in order to prevent people brooding over how badly off they are under Bolshevism. That is, if the people have or think they have any causes of complaint under that régime. And even if no shadow of complaint exists, religion of the opiate kind could at least do no harm. For if the people have no grievances, if they are not badly off here and now, there is no danger of their wanting to change the present order, and it does not matter how much they dream about the world to come. And so far as there is anything at all in the opium theory, it hardly seems to matter whether the drug is self-administered, or whether a priestly class deliberately doses its parishioners for ulterior motives. For in this latter case the ulterior motive only applies so long as the friends of the clergy are in power. If their enemies hold the reins of government, a drugged contentment is obviously not the state of mind the defeated party would desire in the populace. If the clergy wickedly distract men's attention from the injustices of this world, nobody has much of a grievance except the people who have some proposal or other for curing those injustices by a political revolution. But the Bolsheviks clearly do not want any more revolutions, not in Russia. They want to stand pat on the last one. Anything that makes the people contented should be all to the good from their point of view, and if religion is truly the opium

Russia and the Church

of the proletariat, the Bolshevik Government plainly ought to increase the dose as much as possible. At home, that is.

And yet they don't. Far from it. Not only does the Bolshevik State not support the Church; it goes to all this trouble of propaganda and preaching in order to diminish it and cry it down. The explanation, of course, is simply that the statement about religion being the opium of the proletariat, which may or may not be still true in Western Europe, is quite obviously false in Soviet Russia, and is indeed the very reverse of the truth for all practical purposes. Or at any rate the Bolsheviks, right or wrong, are quite obviously persuaded of its falsity, even though they still print it in large letters on crimson banners and keep it inscribed in conspicuous places in the Red Square. If that old battle-cry is still to be regarded as charged with meaning, it must be referred exclusively to conditions in the unregenerate capitalist world. As to Russia itself, the Bolsheviks quite obviously and quite honestly believe that the influence of the Church, generally speaking, is not a purely religious one, that the clergy do not now endeavour to divert the minds of the Russian masses from the present to the future world, but that on the contrary they endeavour to excite them to use the arm of flesh for the purpose of changing the things of this world more to the clergy's liking. In other words, they openly or secretly preach counter-revolution, and do their best to incite their flocks, if not for the present to actual armed rebellion, at any rate to all kinds of passive resistance.

Whether the Russian clergy really do foment counter-revolution, or whether, for example, they "sabotage" the existing Socialist revolution by throwing sand into the machinery of the Five Year Plan whenever opportunity offers—all that is a question of pure fact which in principle ought to be decided, like all other questions of pure fact,

This Russian Business

by the evidence of credible witnesses. But a credible witness means an honest, fair-minded, and competent witness, and we all know, we knew even before the present era of frantic propaganda, that in contemporary political questions, speaking by and large, there are no such witnesses to be had. Not that no one knows any part of the facts, not that no one is honest, not that no one tries to be fair. But the thunder and crash of propaganda is far too great for ordinary men to be able to surely distinguish those modest voices amidst the general bedlam of reckless assertion and passionate denial, the yelling of demagogues, the screaming of party propagandists with axes to grind. And in order to distinguish them at all we are necessarily thrown back on confirmatory evidence of a vaguer but still in some ways a more reliable kind, in fact, upon certain sorts of *circumstantial* evidence. To patiently investigate a thousand contradictory reports of what individual clerics said in sermons or murmured to their parishioners over a glass of tea, and to form solely from this welter of confused tales a general and coherent idea of what the mind of the general body of Russian clerics is on these matters, and what general bias, if any, the Russian clerics as a class try to give to the opinions of the people, is clearly a task too great to be even attempted by modest contemporaries with a sense of proportion, especially if they are foreigners. But one thing we do know, that Russian clerics are men, with human instincts and human passions pretty much like yours and mine, and we can at least consider what their position is, and what we ourselves would feel inclined to do in their places. Now their position is obviously this, that as a result of the Revolution their whole lives have been suddenly and rudely changed for the worse. They were a privileged caste, a well-treated and well-fed division of the ruling class of society, with a secured position, comfortable

Russia and the Church

emoluments, and a prescriptive right to deference and honour. Even the humblest country priest was a powerful man in his village, and the Metropolitans and Patriarchs were very important personages indeed. All the clergy ate the bread of the Czars, and found it reasonably well buttered. Then all that is changed overnight, and in spite of foreign interventions and civil wars, the change endures like a nightmare which one cannot shake off. Now the clergy are outside the circle of the privileged classes. The Church is disestablished. Its shameful riches are confiscated, its vast endowments have become public property, all the ecclesiastical revenues have suddenly dried up. The Revolutionary State pays not a kopek towards the stipends of the clergy, which depend absolutely on the scanty and uncertain alms of their diminishing and doubtful parishioners. Instead of fat living and honour, there is an apostolic poverty and the neglect and contempt of the worldly,—things which ought, of course, to favour the growth of the primitive Christian virtues, but which of us honestly believes that they do? For, of course, the inquiry is not about the reactions of the heroic few, the chosen vessels, the salt wherewith the general body is savoured. What concerns us here is the way in which, say, seven-tenths of the clerical body, or more, may be expected to behave. No doubt a small minority of saintly souls might be in love with Poverty, like St. Francis, and welcome tribulations for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. But in these days even the faithful find it hard to believe that any of the Christian priesthoods contain many men of the temper of Francis; the most part are ordinary mortals who look to their profession first for bread and afterwards for edification. What will be *their* reaction to the régime which brings them to scorn and poverty? The saint may embrace affliction like a lover; the ordinary cleric is a very human person who is

This Russian Business

certain to resent it like an ordinary mortal. To resent the results of the new régime means to desire the return of the old, and the Russian clergy would be more than human if action did not sometimes follow upon desire, as far as they are able to act, and as far as they dare. But how are they to act, and what weapons have they which they can use? The answer is obvious: they have a far-reaching influence on the minds of their congregations, and their obvious cue is to influence them in a thousand open or secret ways tending towards the preparation of a new revolution to restore the ancient order of things. More or less, openly or secretly, it is as certain as anything well can be that the principal weight of the clergy's influence will be thrown in the scale of counter-revolution. So long as human nature is human nature, it is unthinkable that any other thing should happen. It is not that no middle course is logically conceivable. It would be different if only one could believe that in spite of every temptation the vast majority of the clergy always absolutely and deliberately refrained on sheer principle from ever exercising any political influence at all. But who does believe that? What priestly organisation, or what secular organisation either, for that matter, has ever shown such disinterestedness on a grand scale? All history holds no such example; human nature is simply not made like that. When the vital interests of their order are at stake, the question is not whether the clergy exercise any influence of a political sort, but only which side they exercise it on, and once the question takes that form, it answers itself.

That is surely the whole essence of the so-called religious question in Russia. There is not one jot of reliable evidence that the Russian Government has ever persecuted opinion for its own sake, or interfered with private religious beliefs, and no one with any insight into ordinary human nature

Russia and the Church

or any sense of political realities can conceive of their deliberately doing anything so foolish and so irrelevant to their own purposes. But quite apart from their aggressive propaganda, one thing they undoubtedly have done is to confiscate the revenues of the organised Church, and thereby they have struck a tremendous blow at the worldly interests of the clergy. The Bolsheviks believe (and most sincere men will suspect that they have excellent grounds for the belief) that most of the clergy resent this state of things, and that consequently the clergy as a body are passively or actively anti-Bolshevik. As the Bolsheviks on their part lay no claim at all to Christian meekness, it follows from this that they are anti-clerical, and the whole business resolves itself into a struggle by the clergy to recover their ancient wealth and prestige, and a struggle by the Bolsheviks to keep things as they are, or even to weaken and destroy such prestige and influence as the clergy still dispose of for political purposes.

The eventual issue of such a struggle is a fascinating subject for speculation. At present, of course, one may be sure that both parties are more or less in a death-or-victory mood. The clerical mind cannot possibly envisage a far-away future still dominated by the enemy. The wrath of God may afflict us for our sins, the Church may be scourged and chastised, but sooner or later the comfortable normal times must come back; it is impossible to believe that there will be centuries and centuries of Bolshevism. The Bolshevik mind on the other hand has an equal confidence that it is only a matter of time; light must prevail against darkness; after five or ten or twenty or fifty years, superstition will be entirely eradicated; scientific instruments will take the place of ikons, and all men will be reasonable and free. There is something a little naïve about each of these anticipations, and yet it is clear enough that each of them is humanly

This Russian Business

possible; nay more, each of them has a reasonable chance of being completely realised; the *naïveté*, if any, lies only in the illusion of inevitability. For though logic and reason cry out against compromise, all experience shows that history frequently fails to arrange itself upon any reasonable basis. The philosophic historian can always plausibly trace any given state of things back to its causes, thus producing a comfortable illusion of rationality and continuity in human affairs; but one has an uneasy feeling that this is frequently done by neglecting or pushing into the background the far weightier causes which simply frittered themselves away, or checkmated each other, without producing any effects at all. The giants die childless, and pigmies inherit the coming years. The principle of mere chance, the eventual prevailing of the feebler causes, rules a far larger part of human history than human vanity likes to believe.

Supposing then that it happens so in the present case, supposing that neither agnostic Socialism nor organised Christianity (worthy antagonists though they be, each lithe of limb and sound of wind, each fit and apt enough for eventual victory) should at last succeed in eliminating the other from Russia, in "liquidating" the other, as one says in the current language. What will happen then? Is there to be a sort of perpetual tie and wrangle, an endemic struggle, reduced perhaps in proportions and intensity, a smouldering fire that never quite flares up and never quite goes out? It is at least conceivable; there is precedent enough. The history of the Protestant schism in the Christian Church presents a partial analogy; the mediaeval strife of Emperor and Pope, the Gallican controversy in France, the age-long rivalry of Germany and France, even the class struggle itself, the perpetual strife of rich and poor within the nations, all these are phenomena which in different ways

Russia and the Church

and measures tend to persuade us that states of unstable equilibrium, so far from being in the long run impossible, are of the very texture of history; the indecisive struggle, the battle perpetually drawn, is at least as normal as victory and defeat.

The other possible issue is perhaps a deliberate compromise, an eventual agreement of the Concordat type. At the moment nothing could possibly seem more absurd, less "realist," to either of the parties engaged. And yet there are surely some chances in its favour, assuming that the struggle goes on long enough to leave both sides a little weary. For after all, in spite of the shocking wickedness of the Bolsheviks, in spite of the drug-administering habits of the clergy, it is hard to see what logical irreconcilability exists between Socialism and dogmatic religion. The Roman Catholic communion must of course be left out of the question; there, no doubt, the encyclical and the principle of infallibility do between them bar the way. But the real representative of Christianity in Russia is of course the Orthodox Church, and its hands are free. When the essential dogmas of both sides are boiled down, it is after all true that they do not cover the same ground. There is no logical reason, in spite of encyclicals, why given historical views as to the life of Christ, or given opinions as to the nature of the soul or the existence of God or of a future life, should have anything whatever to do with the way the state or the community organises itself for purposes of the production, distribution, and exchange of commodities. And on the other side, even Socialist human beings must have some opinions or other on those religious matters, and these abstract opinions have clearly no necessary connection with or influence on their activities as workers, or producers, or even members of Soviets. There may be many incidental opportunities for friction, but surely the

This Russian Business

point is that all the opportunities are incidental; there is no inherent incompatibility.

If so much is once granted, the conception of an eventual Concordat at any rate ceases to be absurd in principle. Theoretically the thing is perfectly simple, and things that are theoretically possible are rather like the distant relatives of dukes; to-day their chances of succession are negligible, but a sudden death or two may change all that before to-morrow's light. Politics, especially in these revolutionary days, are full of sudden deaths. Age-long traditions and obvious expediencies are abandoned and transformed with bewildering rapidity. America makes war in Europe, kings' crowns are six a penny, the Temporal Power reappears, nicely balanced on a threepenny-bit, Spain goes anti-cleric and the Turk puts on trousers and walks into mosques with his boots on. After all that, it would hardly be very surprising if the Orthodox Church and the Soviet Power some day conspired to forget a little history and suffer each other with some show of gladness, rather than continue indefinitely to bear, on both sides, the enormous expense and discomfort of a hundred per cent. liquidation campaign in which the risk of liquefaction can never be altogether restricted to the adversary. How far the doubtful truce between the Patriarch Tikhon and his followers and the Soviet Power may be thought to tend in the direction of such a settlement is probably a question still too premature even for guessing. But of course the real stumbling-block will always be the question of money. The State might well abandon an unsuccessful anti-religious and anti-clerical propaganda in return for a serious promise of loyalty; and a Russian church at last definitely persuaded that Bolshevism could not be shifted either by force or finesse could easily enough discover that Communism was a form of social organisation not wholly disapproved by God, and might

Russia and the Church

even, after a decent interval, expressly invest the powers that be with that divine right which long continuance confers on even the most unlikely of régimes. But in such negotiations there must obviously be a *quid pro quo*. No Concordat hitherto known has been accepted by the clergy which failed to provide, in some fairly substantial measure, for the payment of their stipends and other ecclesiastical expenses out of the public purse. And even if a Socialist government felt itself rich enough to purchase loyalty at that considerable price, there remains the question of prestige. Clovis could afford to adore what he had burnt, and burn what he had adored, but after a thousand years the French Revolution could not have turned its coat with equal impunity; it was left for Napoleon to restore the dispossessed Church to its ancient honours. It is the same with all new powers; compromise often offers them the most tempting material advantages, and sometimes it is by far the easiest way of avoiding imminent perils, but compromise almost always leads to disaster. A revolutionary government cannot afford to go to Canossa. If Emperors are wrong, they may be allowed to repent, and afterwards, with luck, they may dust their knees and put on their crowns again. But a revolution imposes itself by dint of being in the right, and it must deny itself (at least in public) the luxury of repentance until its power has lasted so long that its revolutionary origin is forgotten. So that we shall most likely be denied the spectacle of the Holy Synod canonising Lenin, or the Metropolitan solemnly blessing the standards of the Red Army.

A Censorship or Two

IT WAS IN KIEV, while we stood on a height looking out over the wide plain of the Dnieper, all red and gold with the autumn foliage, that Augustus finally despaired of the Revolution, as far as the things of the mind were concerned. He should have been looking at the scenery, but instead of that he had been trying to convince Maria Petrovna that no censorship exists in England. He seemed to be making very little headway, and this led him to complain later on that Maria Petrovna was stupid and obstinate. Now this is not quite fair. Maria Petrovna (whom I salute) is extremely intelligent. I cannot deny that she was not only obstinate, but also wrong. But then Augustus was rather aggressive, and when Augustus is aggressive it requires more than human virtue to refrain from being obstinate in sheer self-defence. The perfect apostle must never be contentious, in spite of Pauline precedents. The truth presented in a contentious manner may still be the truth, but it is much harder to get it believed. And Augustus has rather a habit of asserting that two and two makes four in a challenging and matter-of-course tone of voice which immediately suggests to simple and unwary souls that he is nothing but a partisan and an advocate, that there must be something fishy about the statement, and that he is probably paid to say so. So that when Maria insists on making it five, which she sometimes does, Augustus's wrath is not as effective as it ought to be.

The dispute emerged from an earnest attempt on the part of Augustus to extract from Maria Petrovna a coherent account of the Russian laws relating to copyright, which

A Censorship or Two

of course he ought to have gone and looked up in a book. It became clear fairly early in the cross-examination that there were gaps in Maria Petrovna's knowledge of the subject. At a certain point Augustus began to make heavy weather of it, and this evidently irritated him. He obviously felt that Maria Petrovna was keeping something back. It was evidently one of the things which guides were not allowed to tell strangers about. Now Maria is both intelligent and well educated, but she is only twenty or so, and is quite a personable young thing, with a rather captivating smile. It seems likely enough that she has found something more interesting to do with her springtime years than to acquire an encyclopaedic knowledge of these somewhat abstruse matters, even if she does belong to the League of Communist Youth.

But whether she didn't know or wasn't allowed to tell, Augustus did at last discover that Russian authors were not paid by the State at a flat rate of so much per line, as he had feared, but that they received royalties just like other authors. This would have been satisfactory enough, if it were not that they seemed to be taxed on their receipts on the same basis as traders and other unprivileged classes, whereas most ordinary people were practically exempt from direct taxation. This discovery obviously embittered Augustus. It was not only that authors (and artists) were unfairly taxed. They were also lumped with traders, which was a matter of prestige. After wringing this fatal admission from Maria's reluctant lips, he proceeded to further develop the theme of the oppression of authors by the Soviet Power. The dialogue went something like this:

AUG. Then of course there is the Censorship. Your authors can only write what the Government allows them to write.

This Russian Business

MARIA (*eagerly and rashly*). No, no! They can write whatever they like!

AUG. But the Censorship! The Censorship! Books *are* censored. Aren't they?

MARIA (*reluctantly*). Yes, they are censored. (*Then brightly*) But that is only for political matters. You have been telling me that a writer who is really a good writer, whose works are really literature, does not put politics into his books. You say it is not a work of art if it is didactic.

It was true, Augustus had been incautious enough to say just that, in a tirade on art for art's sake with which he had improved Maria Petrovna's mind a little earlier in the afternoon. She saw from his face that he was momentarily quelled, and hurried on to clinch the argument. "If there is no politics in the book, the censor will pass it. It is only the books which you do not approve of that are censored." Augustus swallowed once or twice, and then rallied. "It isn't only what I like," he said handsomely. "A man should be at liberty to publish a bad book if he wants to. You prevent him doing so. That is tyranny!" Maria Petrovna saw that she was losing ground. She instantly threw consistency to the dogs, and fell back on her last trenches. "But of course!" she said, "if people write propaganda against us, if they try to wreck our great work before it is finished, how can we stand by and let them do it? Those people are dangerous, they are enemies to the State—what do you call it, traitors! They must not be allowed to tell lies and poison the people's minds!" And Maria Petrovna's voice became sonorous, and her eyes flashed. She meant every word of it. I began at last to understand what kind of people write the more emotional anti-Socialist articles in the English newspapers. If Maria Petrovna ever had a row with

A Censorship or Two

the Soviet Power, I am sure I could get her a job as a special leader-writer on any of the London dailies, and without any sacrifice of conscience on her part. It would only be necessary for her to write down exactly what she thinks, and then some prudent friend could go over the proof of her articles and strike out the words "bourgeois" and "capitalist" wherever they occurred, and insert in their places other words like "Communist" and "Soviet," and no one would know the difference. But she was still speaking . . . "and you know you have a censorship in England, exactly the same! People cannot publish Communist books in England, or make Communist speeches. If they do they are sent to prison." Now Maria Petrovna really believes this, all of it, and it is pretty evident that most Russians believe it. It is, Augustus says, a piece of infamous propaganda. He did his best for nearly half an hour to make this clear to Maria Petrovna. He told her that she must not believe what she read in the Moscow newspapers. He explained to her that in England there was absolute free speech and complete liberty of the Press, and that anybody could write what he liked, and anybody could say what he liked. In fact, he made rather a welter of it. Maria P., flushed and protesting, was overborne, but unconvinced. She even appealed to me to tell her honestly whether books were not censored in England. When I told her they were not, as far as I knew, I plainly dropped in her estimation. I could see that she doubted my good faith. She gave me a look, more in sorrow than in anger, which seemed to say that she had expected better things from me. I could almost hear her saying to herself, resignedly, that of course the English were not allowed to tell the truth about these things.

But Augustus got nothing out of his victory, for the School Teacher afterwards took us both to task for being

This Russian Business

disingenuous. "It's all very fine," she said, "but you *didn't* tell her the truth, either, not all of it. You only told her as much as it suited you to tell. She happened to ask you just about books. But what about plays? The Lord Chamberlain has something to say to that, hasn't he? And you know jolly well that when it comes to speeches they *do* put Communists in prison quite often." "But that's sedition!" retorted Augustus, "those people are revolutionaries. They're a public menace." "I know," replied the School Teacher, but that's just exactly what Maria Petrovna says about the other people. And it isn't only Communism, either. Didn't you tell me the other day that people can still be tried and sent to prison for blasphemy? And even denying the truth of Christianity is legally blasphemy, isn't it? You ought to have told Maria all that, just to give her a fair chance. But you don't. You take a mean advantage of your superior knowledge to argue the poor girl down." Augustus denied this accusation with suitable vehemence. But of course it was more or less true. If we had been perfectly candid, we ought to have mentioned those other things in order to present a complete and truthful picture of this English liberty of ours. I put it to Augustus that perhaps he ought in conscience to have qualified his denials a little. But he said there wasn't much in that. The censorship of plays was not the same thing. If people really wanted to know what was in the play, they could always read it. And speeches were entirely different. Speeches were made by all sorts of people to a promiscuous crowd. That made all the difference. I pondered this last statement for some little time before it dawned on me what Augustus really meant. Of course it was that the things *he* wants to be said are mostly said by rather academic people in books, and are read by the better sort, who can afford books at seven and sixpence or so a copy. Whereas at public meetings

A Censorship or Two

persons from anywhere and everywhere, persons whom Augustus calls demagogues, mere rough working-men as likely as not, say all sorts of things that Augustus disapproves of.

When one gets down to rock bottom, I think he is right. More and more I feel that we are fundamentally in agreement about all this propaganda question. The essential point is quite clear. We must have lots and lots of propaganda of the sort I believe in, and as far as possible all other propaganda should be stopped. That is the whole thing in a nutshell. And when I come to think of it, that is obviously pretty much how Maria Petrovna feels about it too. We are all agreed on fundamental principles. There isn't twopence worth of difference between any of us. Except, of course, that we are all on different sides, and my side is the right one. "Yes," said the School Teacher, "but which side *are* you on?" "I don't quite know yet," I answered meekly, "but it will be the right one as soon as I am on it."

But whether the pot is any blacker than the kettle or not, there certainly does grow upon one the impression that Russia is almost a watertight compartment as far as information coming from the rest of Europe is concerned. The Russians have always spoken of "Europe" as if they were outside it, and in mind and outlook they are surely as far outside it now as they ever were, though for different reasons. The gulf between Europe and the backward Czardom has been replaced by the gulf between backward Europe and the Revolution. The atmosphere of war still persists, the state of tension, the nervous repulsion, the impossibility of intellectual mingling, the mutual fear of contamination. So the Russians (though not they alone) can have no experience of give and take, no real interchange of ideas (for how shall heresy and orthodoxy exchange ideas) and this lends an air of unreality to their conceptions

This Russian Business

of the contemporary life of the West. Of course the censorship, the deliberate exclusion of foreign political or tendentious literature, plays its part, perhaps a decisive part, in strengthening the tradition of aloofness and remoteness which has persisted through so many centuries. But I suspect that the internal propaganda has at bottom a far stronger influence in that direction. People do not become insular and limited so much because of the ideas which do not reach them, as because of the ideas which monopolise their minds. And if propaganda tends to narrow a nation's mind and throw its judgment somewhat out of focus, this is not without some effect, in the long run, upon the nature of the propaganda itself, for the very propagandist is continually worked upon, more or less, by his own suggestions, so that at last his picture becomes a conventional daub, and his characters are no longer caricatures of any thing that lives, but rather something like the allegorical Virtues and Vices in a mystery play, mere symbolical marionettes, even though they bear the names of famous or notorious individuals.

The "anti-religious" museum in St. Isaac's contains a whole series of posters, caricatures, waxwork groups, and so on, showing in graphic or plastic form a number of notable personages of the Western world plotting together for the overthrow of Soviet Russia. A group that recurs more than once consists of Raymond Poincaré (which dates the picture), Ramsay MacDonald, and the Pope, all hobnobbing together, drawing each other into corners, whispering in each other's ears, all three looking very much like conspirators, and all evidently on familiar terms. And this cheek-by-jowl juxtaposition does not seem to strike anybody as in the least incongruous. Now Ramsay MacDonald, and the Pope, and Poincaré too, are all very respectable persons, and I believe it is true that all of them

A Censorship or Two

have at some time and in some way spoken ill of Bolshevik Russia. But I do not believe that they consulted each other beforehand, or that they meet in an attic to concoct nefarious schemes, or even that they send each other little notes suggesting the next moves in the campaign against the Soviet Republics. And somehow or other one gets the impression that in Russia there is not much difficulty in believing that kind of thing, that for instance the extreme practical unlikelihood of these three personages having ever been together in the same room does not make any impression on the Russian imagination, or in any way spoil the effect of the cartoon. Of course the more intelligent propagandee will not take the attic and the whispering and the drawing into corners literally. But I think it is clear that the main notion of previous consultation, of deliberate co-operation, is taken literally; there is a curious failure to realise that Soviet Russia is not the only preoccupation of Western statesmen, and that just because most of the Capitalist countries react in pretty much the same way to successive phases in the Revolution, it does not always follow that they have a common plan of concerted action elaborately worked out in advance. Substantially, the suggestion of an ultimate common front may be true enough; but the presentation occasionally strikes one as rather naïve. One such instance does not amount to much, but when one finds the same sort of slightly theatrical conventionalism often repeated, one begins to suspect that there is something just a shade too simple, too obviously cut-and-dried, about the views of Western Europe presented to the Russian mind.

It is the censorship, of course, which makes this unreality possible. If there were any kind of counter-propaganda, the official propaganda would probably be considerably improved in quality, at least in this particular respect. The

This Russian Business

censorship is almost the one institution of Czarist days which the Revolution did not sweep away, and by all accounts it is just about as strict now as it was then. Only of course it is the opposite things which are forbidden. It must bring a wan smile sometimes to the faces of at least the older generations of Russians, when they meditate on the continuity of the instrument of suppression, and on the totally diverse nature of the opinions and tendencies which it suppresses, or tries to suppress. All that was permitted fifteen years ago is now forbidden; all that was forbidden is now permitted, more or less. And if in a few years' time the Bolsheviks fall and the Czardom comes to the top again, no doubt the situation will be reversed once more, and so on over and over again, as often as Russia tosses wearily from side to side. In the long run, of course, the people get both sides of the question, even all sides of it. But human life is too short for such a method of getting at the truth to be really satisfactory. If we poor things of wasting clay are to judge these matters at all, we can hardly afford to listen to the plaintiff's speech, and then wait expectantly ten or fifteen years for the defendant's reply. Still, it is hard to see what can be done about it, so long as all the Governments of Europe, and of the world, continue to outvie each other, according to their means and as far as they dare, in the struggle to prevent their respective peoples from hearing the truth. Because of course the truth is the one thing which calls imperatively for suppression, the one thing which in the long run can be dealt with in no other way. If your enemy tells lies, you can show him up, if you have the ear of the people, and a Government (at least a Government strong enough and resolute enough to force some kind of common fairness on the Press) can always get that. He may beat you even then; the people do not always choose the truth even on those rare and

A Censorship or Two

golden occasions when both sides are fairly put. If you want to make dead certain of victory you must not play fair. But then, although you keep the power, you admit yourself in the wrong, and you take a remoter but a heavier risk, the risk of violent overthrow. If you do play fair, and the truth is with you, you have at least the odds in your favour. But if on the contrary your adversary has the truth on his side, your path may be dangerous, but at least it lies plain before you. In such a case there are only two courses open, even to the most Machiavellian of Governments. Your best plan is to knock him on the head, and be done with it. But if his head is too tough, or if he turns out to be a multitude with many heads, there may be some difficulty about that. In that case you must at least prevent him from getting a hearing. And that (combined with a discreet amount of breaking crowns) is actually, in bolder or more timid form, the settled policy of most of the Governments of the world.

There is a defence commonly set up for the Communist censorship, perhaps a specious one. Specious or not, it is a defence which, for what it may be worth, was not available for the Czars, and is not now available for the so-called democratic Governments of Western Europe and America. They say, the Bolshevik apologists, that the censorship is no part of their system, and will disappear when that system is fully established. It is part and parcel of the dictatorship, and will live and die with the dictatorship. It is a temporary weapon for the defence of the revolution in the period of struggle and transition. This period is likened (it is an ever-recurring analogy) to a state of war, and when one considers the intensity of the class struggle in Russia, and even in the West, one cannot say that the analogy is an extravagant one. Now in time of war, or of the danger of war, every State in the world finds it necessary

This Russian Business

to adopt exceptional methods of self-protection, and these are all justified by hard necessity, by the elementary law of self-preservation. Martial law, the state of siege, the suspension of political rights, the suppression of the rights of assembly and free speech—all these are measures which almost everyone has agreed to regard as necessary and justifiable in an emergency. *Salus populi suprema lex*, from the days of Cicero downwards. And the only reasonable attitude towards that apology is to wait and see. If the dictatorship completes its tasks and lays down its arbitrary authority, the apology will be justified by all ordinary rules. But if on the contrary the dictatorship turns out with the lapse of years to be only a self-seeking oligarchy with no end in view but the perpetuation of its own existence, then every violent act by which it defended its power, including the censorship, will be manifestly shown to have been unjustifiable and criminal, not only arbitrary but also fraudulent in the highest degree. Even the Czar's Government stood condemned in the eyes of Europe, not so much because of the evil it did, as because of the patent fact that all those evil things were done with the single purpose of preserving the autocracy. The autocracy was to be eternal: it never even pretended to be a temporary and transitional dictatorship. It did not regard itself or proclaim itself as a steward for the time to come; it was itself by right divine the destined ruler of all the Russias that ever were to be.

And in the matter of censorship, Western Europe lies under that same heavy condemnation. For we *have* a censorship, of sorts, even here in England; we *do* interfere with opinion; we do suppress one side of the case, so far as we can manage it, and by such partly indirect means as our Government has the courage to use. It is not merely the rather ridiculous activities of the Lord Chamberlain, nor even the sporadic interference with meetings and

A Censorship or Two

demonstrations. The worst thing, the most startling invasion of liberty (if anything could still startle us in these days) is the deliberate inclusion of a sort of indirect censorship in public treaties with a foreign Power. We have heard before this of the never-ending audacity of elected persons, but we seldom realise the enormous impertinence of the provision in the Russian treaties relating to abstaining from propaganda in England. Englishmen were formerly accustomed to think they had a right to hear all that was to be said on a subject, to listen to every side of a case, and to judge for themselves. But it turns out that that was all wrong. The sovereign people is not nearly so sovereign as it thought it was. If its rulers and tutors are to be believed, it is not even adult. It has to be protected against itself, and certain doctrines must be kept from its hearing, just as certain plays and pictures are banned for persons under sixteen. The astounding fact is there (and if it fails to astound us, that very failure will stagger the imaginations of our grandchildren, when they study the history of this incomprehensible period) that our Government has deliberately and impudently contracted with a foreign Government over our heads for the purpose of excluding certain political doctrines from the list of the things we are allowed to hear or read about. And it is only in the dimmest way that we realise that we are being treated like children; it is only very occasionally that we ask ourselves who are these egregious persons who have taken on themselves to protect us in this grandmotherly manner, what manner of men they can be who have thus bargained with foreigners that they shall not say shocking things in the children's hearing. But if we do make these inquiries, we find of course, with a certain stupefaction, that these intellectually stronger and worthier men, these predigesters of information for assimilation by the weaker-headed masses, these self-

This Russian Business

appointed sentinels at our spiritual gates, who act as a kind of moral filter, preventing the flow into our minds of whatever is not pure and good and beautiful—that these super-men are after all only the same poor fellows who come cap in hand to us at election times, and with tears in their voices beg us to accord them the honour of being our servants for a further term of years, and that their names are—but we all know their names. Some of them are very worthy fellows in their way. But, with our hands upon our hearts, I do not think we can conscientiously say that we think they are the men for so tremendous and presumptuous an office as the bowdlerising of the world for the benefit of their fellow-citizens. Of course it is not merely a question of the intemperate zeal of the orthodox for pure untainted doctrine. A point of subsidiary but yet considerable importance is that if these heretical opinions should ever prevail in England, all the people who are now in power will be out of power, and most of those who hope to get in will never get in. Iniquity is not made any the less black by the reflection that if iniquity prevails, they, the defenders of righteousness, will be definitely out of the swim. If therefore the mind of the man in the streets of England is really so immature that political doctrine must be edited *ad usum Delphini* for his consumption, it would at least seem reasonable that the editors should not be politicians with an axe to grind.

But one very significant thing about this interference with the expression of opinion, this tragi-comic tariff-wall against ideas, is that in this instance the thing is done by a settled Government functioning on a permanent basis, with a long tradition of stability behind it. There is no pretext of a temporary dictatorship, no excuse of a period of transition. Our Government cannot say that it is busy consolidating a revolution, and must not be disturbed till

A Censorship or Two

it has finished. If the structure of our State is not solid now, it never will be. We have centuries of normal political life behind us—a political life which may be good, bad or indifferent in every other respect, but which is undeniably normal, continuous, flowing more or less steadily in the same direction, without violent upheavals or sudden revolutionary changes. If we cannot have liberty now, when are we to expect it?

AUGUSTUS. But do you at all realise that an unchecked Communist propaganda might be so effective that the whole of the masses might be poisoned by it? ("Poisoned" is what he said. The mere fact that Augustus intends to take the question by storm, by sheer force of logic, never prevents him from begging it to begin with.) Supposing they were allowed free propaganda, and supposing they gained over the great bulk of the labouring classes, what would you have the Government do then?

MYSELF (*swallowing hard*). But what does the Government generally do, for instance, after an election, when the Opposition's propaganda wins over the labouring masses?

AUGUSTUS. That's not the same thing at all.

THE SCHOOL TEACHER (*interrupting*). I'm not so sure about this business of a mutual agreement to abstain from propaganda, like the British and Russian treaty. I don't see anything against it in principle. Only of course you ought to have both kinds of propaganda stopped in the same country, not one in one country and one in another.

AUGUSTUS (*rather suspiciously*). I don't quite see what you mean.

THE SCHOOL TEACHER. Well, take elections, for instance.

This Russian Business

Everybody agrees that there's far too much electioneering, too much talk and chatter and shouting and press campaigning, and the unfortunate elector doesn't get the ghost of a chance to any quiet thinking, which is what he's supposed to do, after all. I think it would be a good idea if the Government and the Opposition could make a bargain that there shouldn't be any propaganda whatever for six weeks or so immediately before the election. No speeches, no posters, no newspaper articles, nothing at all. You could have the regular election campaign before the six weeks started, and end up with a winding-up speech by the leaders of all the parties. And then silence until election day. Think how heavenly that would be. And we could all think like anything for about forty days, without being worried by anybody!

There was something so fascinating, and at the same time almost apocalyptic, about this monstrous vision of a thousand politicians gagged and speechless at the most exciting time of their lives, compulsorily holding their breaths in an awful stillness of six mortal weeks, a stillness pregnant and throbbing with the steady concentrated thinking of twenty million electors, that Augustus and I both became slightly dashed in our spirits, and even a little appalled; and somehow we never got back to our previous subject. Augustus's sentence still hangs petrified in mid-air, and I do not know to this day why it was not the same thing at all. And it is for that reason that I continue to think, ignorantly it may be, that the principal reason for all suppression of political propaganda is that the people who are in power want to stay there, and even when they are quite honest, they are usually naïve enough to believe that no catastrophe could possibly threaten the nation

A Censorship or Two

which would be more disastrous than the loss of their own services. The illusion of indispensability lies somewhere near the root of most genuine political intolerance, whether the thing felt to be indispensable is one's own co-operation merely, or that of one's caste or party.

In one sense, of course, it may be suggested that all these negative interferences with free judgment, censorships and bargains about propaganda and what not, are rather beside the mark, and even that their use betokens an undue timidity on the part of the powers that be, at least wherever those powers have in any case a practical monopoly of the *machinery* of propaganda in their own hands. There is no special point in stopping somebody else's propaganda, if you are in a position to get practically the same result by simply making your own propaganda more intense. To a certain extent it is a question of which side has the most money to pay for publicity, to bribe or browbeat newspapers, and so on. That method may seem a cumbrous and expensive one, but it does avoid certain manifest risks in riding too hard on the curb. And the result achieved is nearly the same in each case. You only want to silence your opponent in a general way and for practical purposes; and it makes comparatively little difference in the end to either of you whether you gag him, or only shout him down. Although on second thoughts the loser would probably prefer the shouting-down method, even so. Even though one were certain to lose the match, it would always be a comfort to have shouted one's loudest.

Well, in Russia that question does not arise; you must not shout at all, unless you are licensed for that purpose. Shouting is frankly a privilege of the orthodox, a monopoly of the supporters of the dictatorship. It must be very galling to the people who want to talk themselves, and are not allowed to, even from the merely personal standpoint. And

This Russian Business

it is worse than that, for the official propaganda is so intense that it is practically impossible not to listen to it, even if you don't like it. It is bad enough for people who feel that they could play Hamlet to be for ever banished from the stage, but it is worse still if they are chained every evening to a seat in the auditorium and obliged to sit through endless inferior performances by second-rate actors. One cannot help feeling that probably even the most convinced supporters of this political repertory company would appreciate an occasional change of programme. They may believe all this combination of propaganda and censorship to be a necessity, but they obviously must sometimes wish that it were not a necessity. I am sure, for instance, that Maria Petrovna feels that the censorship is a thing which must be defended, yes, but which it would be more comfortable not to have to defend.

XVI

The Last Word Wins

COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA in Russia has the same insistent assertiveness, the same obstinately penetrating qualities, as commercial advertisement in Europe and America. It is everywhere. It is all-pervading and all-overflowing. It does not always shout. It runs up and down the whole gamut from trumpeting to whispering, from intolerant assertiveness to almost imperceptible suggestion. All the instruments of publicity, direct and indirect, are pressed into service. There is the poster, the press, the theatre, the cinema, lectures, speeches, broadcasting, pamphlets, everything. But the star performance is of course the poster. Posters are everywhere, in the streets and squares, on railway stations, festooned across the railway, posted on the walls, set up in museums. Bright colours, futurist designs, melodramatic grouping of figures, all the imaginable devices for capturing the attention are brought into play. Here the gigantic figures of the capitalist and the militarist stamp with hobnailed boots upon the poor; there Ramsay MacDonald and the Pope join secret hands behind a battery of cannon pointed at the Soviet Republics. Many of the posters are extremely crude, but they are as often extremely effective. Even the fiercest of Bolshevik-eaters are constrained to admit that Soviet Russia has quite definitely made a success of the poster, at any rate from an artistic and technical point of view. One may or may not agree with the moral pointed by the picture, but it is often impossible to deny that it is extremely well painted. No doubt the illiteracy of a large portion of the population (especially in the country) accounts for the tremendous

This Russian Business

development of this particular form of propaganda, and also to some extent for the propaganda film. Illiteracy is a condition which has left almost no mark on the productions of the Western commercial propagandists, the advertisers. They have, it is true, relied a good deal on the imbecility of the advertisement-reading public, but that is by no means the same thing. The advertiser's public is imbecile but educated, the public of the Russian poster propagandist is intelligent but ignorant. Whether either public really exists in the measure that its respective suggestion-mongers believe, is of course quite another question.

Then there is the propagandist museum, and this again might be roughly paralleled amongst ourselves, not of course by museums, but rather by exhibitions, shows of this and that industry; the same kind of technical and artistic ingenuity has gone into both sets of activities. There are Museums of the Revolution, Historical Museums, and so on, all expounding in graphic or plastic form the struggle of the proletariat in every country against its oppressors, showing forth the acceptable political and economic creeds in a thousand ingenious shapes and settings, preaching the pure Bolshevik doctrine in pictures that need no written commentary.

But the written commentary is not wanting; mottoes, maxims, slogans and catchwords are everywhere. The coinage is stamped, "Workers of all lands, unite!" The outsides of matchboxes, the tins of shoe-polish, the wrappings of small purchases are printed over with denunciations of foreign interventionists or exhortations to further the Five Years Plan. Even trade marks and conventional designs are made to yield whatever juice of doctrinal suggestion can be squeezed out of them. The hammer and the sickle are everywhere, probably the only other emblem that has ever been reproduced so many times is the lictor's axe, the

The Last Word Wins

symbol of Fascist Italy. I remember at Kiev one of the exhibitions of textiles produced by the local Soviet factories, where, amongst other things, they had many new designs in patterned prints and other cotton fabrics. A German lady tourist was admiring one of these very much from a little distance, but closer inspection revealed that the pattern was composed of thousands and thousands of minute red tractors, a mute reminder of the collective farms. The Fräulein bought a piece of stuff with a flowered pattern instead. She said she refused to be dressed entirely in agricultural machinery.

Then of course there is the radio. Free radio. Radio is far too valuable not to be given away. You find it in workers' clubs, in peasants' hostels, in schools, in restaurants, on ships, even in railway trains. And then there are the films. And both films and radio are permeated, almost overloaded, with improving doctrine, with what the Russians refer to enthusiastically as educational matter, and Augustus with equal enthusiasm refers to as poison. And of course there are the schools. In these, naturally enough, Communism, the established form of government, is deliberately and systematically taught, much in the same way as the excellence of the British Constitution is taught in English schools. Augustus does not regard this latter form of teaching as poison. But probably the Communists do.

Well, there it is, all this elaborate apparatus of mass-suggestion, thousand-throated, persistent, enormous, perceptible even from far-off outside lands, a vast continuous murmur of evangelisation that fills all the air for thousands and thousands of miles, across two continents, from almost the borders of Germany to China and the Pacific seas. What does it all amount to? At least it is pretty safe to say that nothing else quite like it, nothing on the same scale, has ever happened in the world before. There is surely no such

This Russian Business

tremendous effort of proselytism to be found in all history. One great movement does perhaps approach it, the far-flung missionary activity of the militant Church in the first nine centuries of the Christian era. But though the territorial scale is more or less comparable, the intensity of the energy expended will stand no comparison at all. For the earth has grown populous since then, and even under Gregory the Great all Christendom can hardly have held half the numbers that are now missionised from Moscow, something like a hundred and sixty millions of men. The unit of evangelisation, obviously, is not so many square miles of country; it is so many thousands of human beings. And even the matter of numbers is a small thing by comparison; the real contrast is in the matter of time. What real success the Russian missionary effort may have it is too early to judge. But what they purpose doing is clear enough, even what they must do, if the whole business is to be worth the doing at all. Their object is to complete this process of indoctrination, to convert Russia to Socialism, within the space of a few short years. The critical years of the régime will obviously be the next five or ten; if it survives those, its foundations will be too firmly set for any easy or sudden overthrow. And if, as its enemies say, it is incapable of surviving, the same space of time will probably make that fact manifest, after the results of the Five Years Plan become visible in a certain perspective. For just that ticklish period Bolshevism stands far more urgently in need of popular support, of doctrinal fervour and mass enthusiasm, than it ever will in the future, admitting that there is a future for it to inherit. And one has to remember that popular enthusiasm for the régime is needed not only to oil the wheels of the Five Years Plan, to bear the weight of reconstruction and industrialisation, but also to meet the possibility of warlike aggression. If the much-dreaded peril of

The Last Word Wins

intervention ever becomes a reality, it will be within those same few years; in ten years' time Soviet Russia will either have collapsed under its own weight, or will be far too strong for any earthly power to attack.

So the propagandist effort, like the plans for industrialisation, takes on a factitious urgency; it has an immediate as well as a remoter justification, and its feverish intensity as well as its enormous scope is dictated in a certain measure by fear, the strongest of all human motives.

The propaganda and the censorship are opposite sides of the same shield; in a Machiavellian sense, perhaps, the one implies the other. If you have a doctrine to preach, it is obviously an advantage if you can silence competing voices; but to put others to silence is as perilous as it is simple, when the persecuting power has no doctrine of its own, or when it has one, but neglects to expound it. This was the error which almost ruined Catholicism at the Reformation; the censorship, the persecution, the negative method broke down, and Luther's doctrine almost flooded the Church; it was not till the counter-Reformation and the preaching of the Jesuits that the endangered cause of Rome rallied, saved itself from disaster, and eventually in a considerable measure triumphed. And in these days the capitalist cause is clearly in that same perilous situation. Its defensive effort is almost wholly of a purely negative kind, and this for obvious reasons. It is easy enough to stop propaganda at the frontiers; it is less easy, but still practicable enough, to put down domestic propaganda, to engross the instruments of publicity, to keep tendentious news out of the papers, to prohibit meetings, to arrest Communist leaders, and so on. But when it comes to putting something in the place of the censored preaching, it is a horse of another colour. Propaganda of a sort there is in plenty, both in the newspapers and out of them: anti-

This Russian Business

Russian propaganda, anti-Communist propaganda, anti-Labour, anti-Socialist propaganda. But of course that is precisely the weakness of all this spate of writing and talking; it is all anti-something or other. At its best it is a destructive criticism of Socialist doctrine; at its worse (and most of it is of the worse kind) it is a stupid and tedious *argumentum ad hominem*: Socialists are fanatics, Socialists are corrupt and dishonest, Socialists take their orders from Moscow, the Russian Government are a gang of scoundrels, the Bolsheviks are all Jews, the Bolsheviks are guilty of atrocities, the Bolsheviks are tyrants, Russia is worked by forced labour, Russians are slaves. No doubt it is all effective enough up to a certain point, but sooner or later the saturation point is reached, the point where the patient and passive propagandist turns round and says, "Yes, I think I have grasped that. The Russians are all wrong. Communism is wicked, Socialism is nonsense. That's that. But what are *your* proposals? There is a thing they call a world crisis. We are all in a pretty bad way. What are *you* going to do about it? What is *your* gospel?" Of course the difficulty is that we have no gospel at all, except perhaps a pious belief that everything will come all right sooner or later, if people will be sufficiently patient. But the whole trouble is that that same patience has been appealed to rather too much, and is now getting a little frayed.

In one country of course there is (with a most strict censorship) some attempt at a real positive counter-propaganda, in Italy, to wit. And Italy is the one country of the West in which anti-Russian propaganda of the kind with which we are familiar practically does not exist, except for very occasional newspaper articles. The Italian Press is full of the virtues and glories of Fascism, its great works, its spiritual triumphs, its spirit of discipline, the "vibrant," the "moving," the "delirious" enthusiasm of the crowds

The Last Word Wins

in the piazzas for the Duce, for the Fascio, for the Lictorium, for every abstract symbol of the régime, for every passing event, for every suitable occasion when the ideal crowd might be expected to manifest emotion of the kind a paternal government can approve. It may be too good to be true, but at least, if it were true, it would be to the point. At least you do hear about Rome, and not about Moscow. Yet perhaps the Fascists lose on the roundabouts what they make on the swings; for they, no more than any other form of reaction, have any positive gospel to preach, any saving word which can promise the common people a real alleviation of their burdens, a life more agreeable to human dignity. As their Liberal opponents were fond of saying once, "Non c'è dottrina," they have no *doctrine*, forgetting that they themselves were in like case. One doctrine of course they have, these imitators of Imperial Rome; it is the doctrine of imperial expansion, the axiom that the eagles never fly backwards. It is terribly perilous, it leads fatally on to slaughter, it will drench Europe in blood again before twenty years are out, if the régime lasts. But in the meantime it does give all this shouting and blather-skite that touch of reality which, in spite of everything, sets it in a class above the stupid recrimination, the paltry calling of names, which is all the propaganda that the reaction in France and England can think of.

Yet there was a time, at least in England, when the cause of capitalism was capable of positive enthusiasm, when free trade and machinery and *laissez-faire* and Trade and Thrift and Progress were still capable of raising a cheer for their own sakes. But of course that was the hey-day of the industrial revolution, and the whole point of that passing enthusiasm was that it was a revolutionary enthusiasm. It was clear that old things were being swept away; the new things were as yet unknown, and their apostles promised

This Russian Business

heaven and earth, as apostles will. Now, unhappily, we know better. You can never rake up the ashes of those dead fires again. But now, the indefatigable propagandist cries, the Bolsheviks do exactly the same; they also promise heaven and earth, and their promises are just as false. But the retort will not answer. The apostles of change have the advantage, as they always must have. It may be that time will answer them, but no other voice is deep enough to break their spell. It is futile for the high priests of reaction to say (and in effect it is exactly what they do say), "We told you a fairy-tale once, but we were found out at the last, you know us now for false prophets; if we were not honest, how can anyone else be honest? if we were wrong, how can anyone else be right? you had better stick to the devil you know!" For in times of stress, excitement, and weariness this same principle of sticking to the devil one knows is very much at a discount. It is the principle which for the most part rules the affairs of men, the principle of taking the path of least resistance; but it is precisely in these moments of crisis and reckless lassitude that such principles are thrown overboard.

One often asks oneself whether in the long run the Russian propaganda will succeed—succeed, that is in the sense of permanently guaranteeing the régime from overthrow. It is in great measure an idle question, for the other circumstances of the case are not known in advance, and a hypothesis which should embrace them all could hardly keep enough touch with reality to be still interesting. It is perhaps less unprofitable to ask whether in the past such a propaganda has ever failed. And by such a propaganda I mean a propaganda answering two conditions—firstly, that it should have, roughly speaking, something like a monopoly of the field, and secondly, that it should in itself have a strong positive content, something definite to offer

The Last Word Wins

which it can keep on offering, some value and attraction on the face of it for large masses of men. Given such a propaganda, and given also that no enormous political or physical catastrophe lays upon the Government burdens of popular disfavour not strictly its own, given that the level of material and moral welfare does not at any time sink too sharply below the accustomed level, it seems to me that all the known elements of permanency are within the control of the ruling power. The most obvious example of such a situation is perhaps the history of the Christian Church, and in particular of the Catholic Church, from the time of Constantine onwards. The Church has always had a doctrine, a doctrine possessing in the highest conceivable degree what might be called the political values. For it offers great things, salvation, eternal life, everlasting joy. Nay more, it also threatens great things; unless you believe, you may be damned; according to the generally prevailing reading, you *must* be damned. And these promises and threats, because they relate to the future world, are of a kind that can never be proved false by any test of experience; it makes no difference to the Faith what corners history may turn. Then the Church has always had something like a monopoly of propaganda, for long centuries an actual monopoly, strengthened with censorships and enforced by persecution, heresy hunts, *autos-da-fé*, and all the physical support of the secular arm. And even after Reformations and disestablishments and secularisations, the Catholic Church especially, and more or less all the sects, have retained a virtual and relative monopoly of propaganda in their own field, a monopoly the machinery of which has not been without deep lessons for secular politicians. The Catholic Church still maintains its formal domestic censorship; all hostile propaganda is on the Index, either by name or category, and in the controversy between the Church and

This Russian Business

its opponents it is mortal sin for the faithful to listen to the other side. Not every sect feels strong enough to go as far as that. But every single one does its best, and mostly with success, to monopolise the instruction of the children born within its dominion, to contrive as far as possible that even secular teaching shall come only through ecclesiastical channels, or at least mixed with doctrinal flavouring. The first impressionable years belong to the Church, and it would go hard if the growing race could not be turned loose upon the world (since needs must in these degenerate days that a certain loosing should take place) with so strong a twist in the mind that no later propaganda can change it. For this early training always provides not merely that orthodoxy shall get its story in first, valuable though that advantage may be. There is a deeper and more sagacious policy still, for the young generation goes forth equipped with emotional prejudices strong enough to guarantee, on the whole, that they shall not even listen thereafter to any rival propaganda, that rival propaganda shall repel, shall shock, even terrify them, nay even that they shall hold it a duty to resent alien propaganda as an insult, as well as avoiding it as perilous and sinful. And then of course the new-grown adult is not left naked to a besieging world of heresy and infidelity; the voice of orthodoxy is ever at his ear, the hand of orthodoxy guides him into what walks and resorts will be profitable for his spiritual well-being, from Sunday-school picnics to cricket clubs, from University colleges to Christian trade unions and Salvation Army bun-shops. The ramifications of this indirect propaganda, this machinery for retaining a hold on the adult faithful, are infinite in their diversity, and there is not the slightest doubt that to an adequate extent they are successful, at any rate in the case of the Catholic Church. The other sects can claim as a rule only a more qualified success; at the best

The Last Word Wins

they hold their own, but in a world of turbulent changes and subversive modern ideas even that is something. The proof of the pudding is in the eating; after all the centuries and in spite of every vicissitude a doctrine in flat contradiction with every modern idea, an organisation directly opposed to the strong tide of modern tendencies, persists and flourishes almost as in the hey-day of its strength.

It is true that in the Protestant sects there are signs of decadence and wavering, of a weakened grip on the congregations, a general failure of strength. But this only strengthens one's impression that propaganda, monopolistic propaganda, is the source of vigour and the principle of life. For it is precisely in the Protestant sects that propaganda has become slackened, that the *monopoly* of propaganda, the first word and the last word and the word in between, has to a considerable extent been lost, and this because of desperate weaknesses inherent in Protestant dogma and ecclesiastic organisation. For the whole Reformation is built upon the fatal principle of liberty, the disastrous right of private judgment. Where it is the duty of the common man to think for himself, wherever it is once admitted that the Church as such is not infallible, the possibility of authoritative and exclusive propaganda is irrevocably lost. Assiduous ingenuity can still do something, but it is an uphill struggle; the forces of disintegration have always the advantage.

A merely secular power, an aristocracy, a plutocracy, can never be in quite the same position of impregnable advantage as an infallible Church. But so much is hardly needed to maintain (even though somewhat precariously) a general prevalence, a practically permanent ascendancy, a dominance strong and deep enough to ride the waves of vicissitude. It will suffice for that, in a general way, if the Government, or the ruling class, can keep under its control by far the

This Russian Business

greatest part of the organs of propaganda, and (in a modern State) especially nine-tenths of the Press. Such propaganda can never have the highest qualities. It cannot profess to be infallible. It cannot promise Heaven or threaten Hell-fire. But inferior quality can, with good management, be compensated by sheer quantity sufficiently for all practical purposes. Here again the proof of the pudding is in the eating. In modern "democratic" states, the present controversy between Socialism and what for want of a better word one must still call Capitalism is already of long duration. Socialism has been active and militant in Europe for almost a hundred years; organised and powerful Socialist Parties have existed for many decades, and that in countries with parliamentary Governments, even with universal suffrage. Yet no Socialist State exists in Europe or out of it (except in Russia, where it was established by violent revolution); nay more, no Socialist Party has ever controlled the parliamentary machine in a great State for any appreciable time. And yet all this time party has followed party in the seats of the mighty, Governments have succeeded each other in a steady rhythm, the fickle electorate has never ceased to stick up ministries and knock them down again in a monotonous game of political ninepins. Why is it that amongst all these restless vicissitudes the Socialist Parties have always been cast for Cinderella's part, always out in the cold, always checking just short of the goal, often on the verge of triumph, never once in the full tide of success?

There are of course various smug answers that did well enough for a certain time, but it is too late now for complacency of that sort. It would be hard in these rather cynical days to find anyone naïve enough to accept the explanation that the phenomenon is due to the robust common sense of the British (and all other) electors, to the fundamental unsoundness of the Socialist doctrine, to the sterling

The Last Word Wins

moderation of the British working man (and all other working men) and so on. It is not only that these explanations beg the question. Far more immediately to the point is the obvious fact that doctrines do not need to be sound in order to succeed. "Hanging the Kaiser" and "Making Germany pay" are not now thought to have been very sound doctrines. But they were a thumping success at the time. The Socialistic doctrine is on the face of it an excellent doctrine from the electoral point of view. It contains obvious elements of popularity; *a priori* it should be well in the running for complete success. Yet it has never once succeeded. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that this persistent failure is due purely and simply to the practical monopoly of the organs of publicity by what are called in Germany "the bourgeois parties," by the political forces which enjoy in various degrees the support, whether willing or grudging, of one section or another of the moneyed classes. The existence of such a practical monopoly is too obvious to require illustration. Nor is it an accidental or temporary phenomenon. So long as the Press is the subject of private property (and nothing is more morally certain than that it always will be that) an overwhelming proportion of it must necessarily be controlled by the propertied classes, controlled both directly through actual ownership and indirectly through advertisements. A political party which represents the labouring masses, the dispossessed, the have-nots, cannot, by definition, have at its disposal a large fraction of the newspapers, any more than it can own most of the coal-mines or iron-foundries, or have vast possessions in landed estate. And whoever has the Press, in a modern parliamentary State, has everything. There is no other form of propaganda which pours itself into every householder's ear seven times a week at breakfast-time. And it goes further than that, for every person whom the same householder

This Russian Business

talks to from morning to night has already been filled with the same gospel at his own breakfast-table. After a few years of that kind of thing, there is not much to be done with a few speeches in the park or at street-corners, and even six or eight weeks' electioneering cannot go very far in the other direction, especially as in any case most electioneering is done through the Press. The side which owns twenty newspapers to the other side's one simply *must* win in the long run, unless it commits the most enormous tactical mistakes.

Of course the possession of the means of propaganda is not absolutely the last ditch of conservatism. For no system of advantages is foolproof; accidents will happen, and it may be that by some unlucky turn of events the party of the dispossessed may be momentarily in front on a count of heads, so as not merely to clothe its leaders with the idle paraphernalia of office, but actually (let us say) to place them in real control of the House of Commons. It is quite clear that all constitutions which are to be at all safe from the bourgeois point of view must in some way provide against untoward chances of that kind, must have an extra line of defence to secure the ruling classes against the effects of such a breakdown of the electoral machinery. This precaution has almost everywhere been taken, the extra line of defence, the emergency expedient, does exist in one form or another. A single election is nowhere sufficient to give unfettered power to any popular party, and two or three in succession is a moral impossibility; for that gives time for the machinery of propaganda to be overhauled and got going again; it can hardly fail twice. Experience has verified that course of events with steady consistency, especially in the newer countries, where the emergency situation more easily arises, and it is hardly rash to say that no other result is to be looked for in any future case. Labour

The Last Word Wins

Parties, Socialist Parties may briefly hold the power of the State in a Capitalist country, conceivably even in the conservative and traditionalist States of Europe, but their position must always be unstable; the fact that the party of reaction still controls the Press definitely ensures the impermanence of popular power.

If there were really any such thing as a democratic country, the position might be different. It is conceivable that in such a country the working-class party once in power even for a brief period might by constitutional means bridle the power of the hostile Press, and so more or less equalise the odds; they might for instance compel by legislation the printing of their own case, and their own version of the news, in parallel columns, and so on. Or they might perhaps get the whole, or the most part, of their programme enacted into law, during the life of a single Parliament. But no such thing can ever happen, for here they encounter the second line of defence, which consists in the fact that in so-called democratic countries the democratic form of the representative institutions is always superficial and illusory. There is always a catch somewhere, always some constitutional obstacle in the background sufficient to make a victory of the popular party the mere simulacrum of victory. As a rule it is a second chamber of the legislature. Or else there is a federal form of government, with second chambers to boot. Or there may be an executive veto on legislation. And finally the United States (not to mention the Commonwealth of Australia) have evolved a very remarkable system which really amounts (in certain important classes of cases) to the vesting of a political veto in the Supreme Court of Judicature. In England of course it is the House of Lords, which even now can hold up anything and everything for two long years—two years of intense Press propaganda, two years in which the life of a

This Russian Business

Parliament may run out, two years of intrigue during which anything may be bought and sold. And then in the ultimate background, there is, whatever unknown power may still reside in the half-disused machinery of the royal prerogative, machinery commonly supposed to be hopelessly rusted, but which a careful conservatism has always refrained from dismantling, surely in the fond expectation that at some moment of grave emergency it still might serve a turn. In France there is a Senate, in some ways a more logical and efficient organ of reaction even than the House of Lords. Germany and the United States are federations, and so are Canada, Australia, and South Africa, Austria and Switzerland, Mexico and Brazil. It was perhaps the Holy Roman Empire which really started federalism, and which provided the earliest and most complete instance (to date) of its inevitable breakdown. Most of the federations are too new to have demonstrated how unworkable they are. Switzerland is an exception, Canada is partly an exception; these two Governments show no tendency to break down. But Switzerland is too small, and besides, in Switzerland there is a third power above all, the popular initiative and referendum, which represents an enormous inroad of real democracy into the parliamentary sham-fighting. And Canada is only a federation in name, for the Provinces are not sovereign States, as they are in Germany and America (not to mention Australia). In both Germany and America, especially America, the federal system, considered as an engine of obstruction, is almost perfect. By and large, no sweeping change can ever be made, lawfully, except by the simultaneous consent of the federal legislature and the local legislatures, a thing morally impossible, and in any case normally requiring the lapse of some years for a number of elections to different chambers to take place at different fixed periods. And to make all sure, in both of these great

The Last Word Wins

federations both the national and the local legislatures have a second chamber, with a vested right to put a spoke in any wheel which shows any tendency to revolve in the wrong direction. It would be tedious to go through the catalogue of constitutional States, but in all, or practically all, of those that pretend to be democracies there is the same tremendous loading of the odds in favour of conservatism and reaction, the same elaborately designed machinery (though of a hundred ingenious types) for ensuring that nothing the popular party wants done shall ever be done, except upon conditions which are humanly impossible. It is a game of head I win, tails you lose.

Of course not every "democratic" parliamentary constitution is equally efficient for the purpose of defeating democracy, but the point is that all of them are efficient enough for any ordinary kind of emergency. In some of them of course security is piled upon security. An Upper House may be either appointed by the executive power as in England and many English Dominion parliaments, or it may be elected on a restricted property franchise, or by some cumbrous indirect machinery. In the first class of cases the guarantee of immobility is not quite absolute. Logically, theoretically, the party of change might win even against all probability, even perhaps where a federal system exists. It might keep on winning election after election until every representative body that had any say in the matter was of its own mind; it might swamp the House of Lords, or the Colonial Upper Houses, by a series of new appointments whenever any important measure was to be passed, and as often as the appointees changed their coats between one vote and the next. Of course in British Dominions where the second chamber is elected on a property franchise, not even this logical possibility exists. But one can hardly cumber the argument with details so absurd as

This Russian Business

the constitution of British Dominions. Suppose, then, that in some more normal home of "democracy" this theoretical possibility miraculously translates itself into reality (miraculously, because apart from the mathematical odds against it and the human instability of electorates, there is naturally an organised and venomous Press campaign going on all this time), but suppose it does happen, has reaction then said its last word? Not yet. If the miracle happens, and the editorials of the Fourth Estate fail to stem the tide of proletarian unanimity, there is still the Fifth Estate. There is the National Debt. The open direct intervention of international finance in domestic politics is in some ways a desperate expedient, but recent history has shown that it is a risk which the holders of the purse-strings are prepared to take when all else fails. And surely we have also discovered that the risk, the unsettling effect, the indignation aroused in the general population by this dramatic stripping off of the velvet glove, this open resolute abandonment of the fiction of popular sovereignty, is nothing like so great as more timorous generations of the uncrowned kings of Europe had fondly supposed. Now they know better. *Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.* We shall have plenty of it later on.

But even if formal constitutions bar the way to change, even if the financial god from the machine can be invoked in the last resort, the fact remains that neither of these expedients can be relied on for ordinary use. They can take the weight of a sudden emergency, but their strength lies in the fact that their existence is not generally realised; they will not do for the heat and burden of workaday politics. The substantial reliance must always be placed on propaganda; it is the function of propaganda to keep covered as far as possible the naked reality of power, and to manage ninety-nine times out of a hundred to do,

The Last Word Wins

because the people wish it, the thing which will in fact be done whether the people wish it or not. For of course nothing is clearer than this, that the very same thing which can easily be done once in a hundred times could never have the slightest chance of success if it had to be done fifty times out of a hundred. When all is said and done the people are the ultimate source of power; all strength bases itself at last on human will and human passion; flesh and blood has the last word. The machinery of statecraft may be technically perfect, but it is brittle, it cannot be otherwise. It will only stand a certain strain, an occasional sharp stress; if the people press too hard it will give way. Propaganda ensures that the maximum strain shall never be exceeded; Press propaganda especially is the true "opium of the people," and so far it has always proved more than equal to the demands made upon it.

But if propaganda is so effective a means of government, not only where (as in the Catholic Church) it is exercised by a centralised authority vested with peculiar advantages for securing trust and obedience, but also when employed by the governing classes in the comparatively difficult conditions of modern parliamentary democracies, it seems clear *a priori* that at least an equal success may be reasonably expected from its steady use in Russia, where the conditions are in some respects much more favourable than in Western countries. Of course from the Russian point of view, from the Socialist point of view, that propaganda will succeed, above all, because it is true, because it corresponds to deep realities. That is a controversy too vast to be entered upon here; it is, in fact, the whole issue now at stake. Most of us have our own opinion one way or the other, and we may as well acknowledge honestly that it is an opinion based far more upon emotional elements—in a word, upon faith, than upon any arm-chair reasonings. Nor will we be so shallow or self-complacent as to regret that this should

This Russian Business

be so. The last word ought to lie with reason, and that is a principle worth fighting for when the hour strikes. But now that hour has gone by, or is not yet come. We live in a dynamic period; it is the time for action and struggle; the battle is already joined. On both sides this is the hour for execution, and for carrying out, with such enthusiasm and fortitude as may be in us, resolutions already taken at the stage when reflection was in season. That stage will come again when the smoke clears away, but for this present the function of thinking is a passive one, and is concerned with the examination of events rather than with influencing purposes.

From this point of view it is worth while to consider that if the Russian propaganda is true, its success will be all the more assured by certain occasional and incidental advantages, and that because of those same advantages, even if it is not true, it may nevertheless succeed. The Soviet power has a monopoly (for practical purposes) of all positive propaganda. It has also (what no Western State except Italy and a minor dictatorship or two has) a complete external and internal censorship. It has a positive doctrine to preach, one which makes large promises extremely to the point, and one which, having never yet been put to the test, has never yet been proved false. And lastly, it is assisted by the very political isolation of Russia, an asset forced into its hands by the angry hostility of all the capitalist governments. It is this isolation which in practice places at the disposal of Soviet internal propaganda all the emotions aroused by the defence of the fatherland against a threatened invasion of foreign enemies, and strangely combines for the purpose in hand the fervour appropriate to two doctrines diametrically opposed one to the other, making willing and strenuous yoke-fellows of national patriotism and international Socialism. It will take a great deal of bungling to fail, with all these odds to the good.

XVII

Politics and Terrorism

I REMEMBER ONCE in Moscow listening to a quite frivolous conversation between three of our tourists, more or less as follows: "I'm disappointed about the Ogpu," said the School Teacher. "What *is* the Ogpu?" asked a flippant young man. With a gesture expressive of patient suffering, the School Teacher appealed simultaneously to Augustus and to the listening heavens. "What *are* you to do with a man who doesn't know about the Ogpu? Don't you ever read the London newspapers?" "What I read," replied the Flippant Young Man, "is between myself and my Maker. I can't prevent Him looking over my shoulder, but nobody else shall, not even you. But all this doesn't tell me what the Ogpu is." "It's the secret service, of course," said Augustus. "Sort of political C.I.D. Shadows suspects, and that kind of thing." "That's what I'm complaining about," said the School Teacher. "I was assured that every foreigner in Russia was dogged by an agent of the Ogpu wherever he went. I was quite thrilled. It seemed so dangerous and romantic. It's one of the things that induced me to come. And I've never once laid eyes on anybody that even looked like an Ogpu agent!" "Don't be silly!" said the F.Y.M. "Obviously, if an Ogpu agent looked like an Ogpu agent, he would be sacked at once. The secret police are much more subtle than that. I read William Le Queux and Edgar Wallace, even if I don't read the newspapers. In the last chapter, the secret agent always turns out to be some fellow you didn't suspect at all. The chap you thought was the Duke, or the portly butler. How do you know Augustus isn't an Ogpu agent?"

This Russian Business

Or me?" But Augustus had begun to glower. "It isn't quite so much of a joke as all that," he said firmly. "It's well known that all foreigners are more or less under surveillance." "Surveillance!" cried the F.Y.M. excitedly. "That's the word I was trying to think of. In one of Edgar Wallace's stories——" But Augustus's deep bass voice overbore him. "As I was saying, they have a very fully developed system of espionage. It's well known. It's not only in Russia. They have their men in every country in Europe. They have kidnapped men in Paris, and arranged assassinations in Hungary. . . ."

There was a good deal more to it, and I don't think any very definite conclusion was ever reached. It is a tattered argument, and we have all listened to a hundred such conversations. But sooner or later there crops up in nearly all of them one rather curious fact which I hardly know how to explain, namely, that all the more exotic and sensational stories about the Ogpu and the Cheka are somehow much easier to treat seriously when one is not actually in Russia. In Russia it requires a dead lift of the mind, an effort of the critical intellect, to realise that every one of those stories might after all be true. Somehow or other, the atmosphere is all wrong. The stage is not properly lighted. There is, to the ordinary tourist, an air of obstinate normality everywhere which makes it very difficult to conjure up in any vivid way the silent, deadly, and yet somewhat theatrical activities of a ubiquitous secret service. I do not pretend to deny those activities, nor to cast doubt on any single instance of their exercise which anybody has ever alleged that he knows of. It is sufficiently obvious that no casual visitor is any better qualified, on the strength of his own observations, either to deny or confirm such reports than he was before he ever set foot on Russian soil. I only remark, with perhaps a

Politics and Terrorism

somewhat naïve surprise, on the psychological fact that in my experience, and evidently in that of a number of other people, the favourable atmosphere for the absorption of such narratives is the atmosphere of England, and not the atmosphere of the land where the scene of the narrative is laid. I say "naïve" rather shamefacedly, because it occurs to me that I ought to have foreseen this. Of course one hardly expected in any case to see political suspects being taken by the throat in the Nevsky Prospect, or police perquisitions being carried out while the town crier drew the populace to the spot. That was hardly the point. It was not so much that one failed to find in Russia a strained and abnormal atmosphere, which probably in any event a mere visitor never would have found, however real and intense it might be. It was rather that after being for a little time out of England, and out of Western Europe, out of reach of newspapers and so on, one began to realise the existence of an element of strain and abnormality in the atmosphere one had been living in, and breathing, in England itself. For on this subject the common atmosphere in Western Europe obviously does still contain a certain element of artificiality, of strain and excitability. There is not perhaps in these days the same definitely hysterical frame of mind to be observed which was so common some years back, a frame of mind evidently comparable with the attitude of the British public to German atrocities during the war. This last atmosphere of course has definitely vanished, melted away into the thinner surrounding air which men breathe when their pulses follow a normal rhythm. It would not be the slightest use in this year of grace to represent the Germans as a nation of bloody and Satanic maniacs, whose principal diversions were tearing babies to pieces and outraging the women of conquered territories. The market for such stories slumped heavily

This Russian Business

a year or two after the peace; now it practically does not exist at all, and we are even rather inclined to deprecate the suggestion that there ever was such a market.

In these days of easy communications, popular education, and complicated international relationships it has become quite out of the question to keep mass hatred and suspicion at quite so frantic a pitch for an indefinite period. In the Middle Ages it could be done. The Jews continued to eat Christian babies for many hundreds of years, and just precisely in Russia they appear to have continued the horrid practice right up to the Revolution, if pogroms are any guide. And the Moslems also kept on being wicked enough to justify Crusades for at least a couple of centuries. But those times are past beyond recall. The same spirit can still be roused, but it has become a costly and rather difficult business. It needs some great convulsion of the human spirit, a war or a revolution, and even then it never much outlives its causes. It has its hey-day and its decline, and the decline is inevitable; once it is fairly under way it is practically impossible to stop it; the cycle must take its course. Now the wave of popular faith in Russian atrocities is, as I judge, already somewhat past its crest. The air is still thick with intense suspicion, but there are some signs of clearing, and in a few years' time we shall probably hear no more of the Cheka than we do of the angels of Mons or the corpse factory in the Rhineland. For that very reason it is not without profit to turn our eyes upon this receding tide before it ebbs beyond common sight and ordinary memory, and to curiously observe the extent of its flooding while the marks are yet wet upon the shore.

If there is one thing clear from the history of all these periods of hatred and credulity, it is that the extent to which the minds of men are inflamed, and the dynamic

Politics and Terrorism

nature of the conviction which then steeps and possesses the spirit of great multitudes of people, bears practically no relation whatever to the objective truth, or even the objective plausibility, of the concrete allegations on which this vast and vague indignation is ultimately based. What might be called the machinery of conviction, the process by which the multitudes are persuaded, is exactly the same where evidential facts are scarce, and where they litter the ground like autumn leaves. In a case where only the prosecutor is to be heard, any honest jury will always give a verdict against the accused unless the prosecutor makes an awful mess of his case; especially if it is one of those cases (by no means uncommon ones) where, as a result of undue police publicity beforehand, the minds of the jurymen are practically made up before they hear any evidence at all.

So in this contemporary case of Russian atrocities, if all these stories find in England and elsewhere a ready reception and an indiscriminate acceptance, it is not because they are true or because they bear any of the marks of truth, though I say again that as far as I know every single one of them may be literally true down to the last desperate detail. Their truth is almost wholly irrelevant. They are received and embraced simply because of the existence in England for now almost fifteen years of an emotional propaganda so persistent and pervasive, so steeping and colouring the minds of all of us (and sometimes even of those responsible for the propaganda) that practically any story of Bolshevik wickedness, however manifestly absurd, can get some sort of acceptance, and all the more plausible and better constructed stories would still be sure of wide and immediate credence, even though every single word of them were false.

It is no great wonder if a minority of English people,

This Russian Business

in full reaction against this boundless indiscriminate credulity, have gone to the other extreme, and refuse to believe anything whatever to the disadvantage of Russia which is reported in the Press. But of course that attitude, though natural, is just as emotional as the other. The fact remains that all these stories may after all be true; an uneasy doubt persists below the surface, and wherever the exaltation of implicit faith has once faltered, there generally sets in at last a certain lassitude and lack of interest, a kind of intellectual listlessness, a refusal to bother about anybody else's politics, or even about one's own. Which, of course, is an extremely perilous state of mind, if large masses of the population get into it. It is, in fact, the disease of which most democracies have died. Such a condition of weariness and disillusion is precisely what enabled the sixpenny Napoleons of post-war Europe to overthrow constitutions and set up their somewhat theatrical dictatorships, one after another, in so many of the smaller states, as well as in one great one. In Italy the dictatorship has taken some sort of root; in Greece and Spain it has already given way to a new revolution; in Poland, Hungary, and Jugoslavia it still drags out a fitful and feverish existence. In one form or another the epidemic intermittently threatens the greater part of Europe. In England no such overturn can ever take place, but this, as we all know, is due exclusively to the superior stability of British institutions and the sterling common sense of the English people. Still, even here the spirit of discouragement and political agnosticism spreads apace, and next to our own domestic disillusionments one of the most remarkable minor causes, or symptoms, is the extreme disinterestedness affected by the small but growing class of people who were formerly rather emotional about Russia (as they had been about Germany some years before) but who, having now sobered

down, are suffering from a kind of political headache, and are inclined to wish they had not so easily given themselves away.

But after all, what are we to do about it? If we discover that we have been living in an atmosphere of emotional humbug, surely we are entitled to indulge ourselves in a little human disgust, and to take the easiest course to prevent ourselves being humbugged any more. The trouble is that any other course requires a great deal of effort, and perhaps is even really impossible. No doubt we ought to examine critically what we used to swallow whole, and try to discern on some reasonable grounds what is genuine and what is, to use the homely vernacular, faked. But it is not so easy. There is a tremendous mass of stories and reports of one sort or another, tales of spying, kidnapping, hairbreadth escapes, assassinations, secret trials, exiles in Siberia, dungeons, executions, and what not. I do not mean the cases, numerous enough in all conscience, of officially admitted executions for treason. It is not from these that most of the atrocity atmosphere arises, but rather from the suggestion of other violences far more extensive and at least partly secret. It is here that the main difficulty arises. Between the utmost that a pro-Bolshevik will admit, and the least that an anti-Bolshevik will be contented to affirm, there lies almost the whole bulk of these allegations. Some of it may be sober truth, some of it sheer lying and deliberate invention, a good deal of it mere newspaper sensationalism, distortion and exaggeration of reports originally honest. At present it is quite impossible, even if it were necessary, to sort out and sift all this accumulation of rumours. It might be possible, with infinite labour and much good fortune, to track down the very truth of this or that isolated report. But that will not help us very much. It is a question of quantity, of proportion. The essential

This Russian Business

thing is the enormous volume of such news, or propaganda, or whatever it is, the infinite repetition that creates an atmosphere in men's minds, the suggestion that these sinister practices are so constant and far-reaching, so much the very warp and woof of everyday existence in those lands, that all the sky of Russia is darkened by them, that all men's lives are clouded by a vast and secret apprehension. It is the general picture that we want to know about, the picture of a universal reign of terror, formerly open and flagrant, and in these later years perhaps more subterranean and secret, but still continuing with undiminished force. Is this picture in its main outlines true or false?

To answer such a question off-hand is unfortunately only too easy. To refuse to answer it at all, to deny its relevance to our own affairs, is still easy enough for certain kinds of minds. But to make an honest attempt at a serious answer is always a matter of tremendous difficulty for contemporary observers. Authentic materials are never available in any quantity at all corresponding to the enormous scope of the inquiry. And even if they were available, the supply of cool and competent investigators is necessarily so limited that one can almost say that they do not exist. As for competence, we might make some sort of shift with the very few Western Europeans who, besides the other necessary qualifications, speak Russian fluently, and have actually lived for three or four years in revolutionary Russia. But coolness is another matter. Impartiality is not a common virtue at any time, and in extraordinary circumstances like these it not only becomes still less common, but it almost ceases to be a virtue. What bloodless dissector of the deeds and words of men can really say, with his hand upon his heart, that he has neither part nor passion in that tremendous drama which now goes forward

Politics and Terrorism

in Eastern Europe, and the issue of which may easily settle the destiny of all the West, even of the whole world, for many centuries to come? Our poor intellects are no such engines of steel and crystal; and the more we recognise this elementary fact, the less we flatter ourselves by attributing to our own judgments a miraculous insight which they are far from being endowed with, the easier it will be to admit that certain questions must remain open for a considerable time to come. It is not necessary to say there is no answer, or to pettishly turn away our faces and refuse to bother. But it is no use either hoping to be certain, or insisting upon being dogmatic (a very different frame of mind), on a matter which none of us is qualified to judge impartially, and which does not lie open to our gaze even if we were impartial. Whether this atmosphere created by thousand-voiced rumour really reflects the face of Russia, or whether, on the whole, it is a mirage projected on the clouds by the insane imaginations of Western propagandists, is and will long be a doubtful question, an unsolved problem, a knot which any fool can cut, but which nothing but time can unloose. Such a position neither flatters our vanity nor satisfies our curiosity, but we had better make up our minds to it, unless we are content to be the conscious or unconscious victims of political charlatanry. No doubt on some far distant day History will lift its nose out of the dust and calmly tell posterity the truth; but you and I will be none the wiser for that. In the meantime it is clearly a case, not for disinterestedness, but for suspended judgment, that most difficult of all the exercises of the mind. Guessing at the truth, taking a chance, is well enough where you are under an obligation to act. If you are imperiously called on to do something, to make a practical decision, you must come to some conclusion about the facts, and you must do it at once, however unsatisfactory

This Russian Business

your material may be. Even if you have to toss up, you have fifty chances out of a hundred of being right, and obviously you ought to toss up. But we are not in that position. After all, it is not our business, not in the sense that we are called on to go out and knock somebody on the head about it. We are not our brothers' keepers to that extent; we live (at least since 1920) in a more matter-of-fact world; most of us are agreed that we will not again violently interfere in the party quarrels of other nations, if we can help it. That position may be morally indefensible, but politically it is justified by overwhelming motives of expediency; it is the indispensable condition of international stability. The Russians, on the other hand, are bound to take these decisions, and for that purpose to form definite opinions; but they at least are on the spot; and if they are bound to be even more passionate and partisan than we are, at least they cannot be quite as ignorant. It is true that in the long run their cause is our cause. One of their parties must be right, one of them ought to prevail; and when to-morrow the same controversy becomes urgent in our own country, it is probable enough that their experience will go far to turn the scale. In other words, the Russian people, while engaged about their own affairs, are no doubt in a sense picking chestnuts out of the fire for us. It may be selfish to let them burn their fingers by themselves, but mankind has lived for a good many centuries at about that level of egotism, and is likely to keep on with it for some time yet. Besides, we are never explicitly called on to quarrel with the Russians because of their politics, but only because of the nasty way they (as it is alleged) carry on the dispute. If we were plainly asked to help the Bolsheviks because Communism is a good thing, or to subsidise a counter-revolution because Communism is a bad thing, there would be some kind of

Politics and Terrorism

sense in it. But to be asked to condemn, or perhaps even to attack, one of the parties because it is not playing fair, because it hits the other party too hard, or hits below the belt, is (to descend to the vernacular) coming it a bit too thick. It is not for decisions as gratuitous as that that the device of tossing-up was invented.

Terror as a political weapon is of course no new thing in history, although it was left for the vicissitudes of the Russian upheaval, with its Red Terrors and White Terrors, to render necessary a distinctive nomenclature rather suggesting the Wars of the Roses. It is of course the same principle, in essence, which underlies most criminal legislation in all ages. You punish a robber or a murderer, not solely nor even principally out of revenge, nor because punishment may reform him, nor yet merely to teach him not to do it again, but chiefly because of the so-called deterrent effect on others. And for the sake of this deterrent effect you often, if not generally, punish him more severely than you would do if the effect upon other possible evil-doers were absent from your mind. The punishment fits partly the particular crime, but partly also the chances of crime in general. In this sense justice almost always plays to the gallery. And this evidently highly immoral element both in criminal legislation and in the discretion exercised by judges is justified upon grounds of expediency. *Salus populi suprema lex*. The criminal population must be cowed. Depraved consciences can only be reached by fear. Reformatories and humanitarianism have their proper place and influence, but at a certain point the velvet glove must be stripped off. Let kindness do what it can, but at the latter end is force, and the public power must be resolute to use it, or civilisation falls to pieces. And the use of force must be open and resounding enough for all wrongdoers or would-be wrongdoers to be conscious of it;

they must feel that punishment, at a certain point, will be sure and inexorable; there can be no paltering; it must be not only true, but patent, that "the magistrate beareth not the sword in vain."

So much almost all men approve; upon that our societies are built. But we do not always realise that the political reign of terror is based upon that very same principle, and justifies itself by exactly the same motives of expediency. For when a Government proceeds with unusual rigour against those who plan its overthrow, or who are suspected of such plans, when it resorts to persecution and massacre, it obviously does so because it believes its own existence to be in danger, and also believes that the spectacle of this swift and wholesale retribution will cause other people who may have had attacks upon or plots against the Government in mind to think better of it. When Power feels itself threatened, it makes no account of the motives or morals of its enemies; against the criminal and the rebel alike it uses the same terrorist weapons. And if nevertheless we approve of deterrent criminal legislation, or criminal legislation with a deterrent element in it, and at the same time disapprove of political terrorism even in moderate doses, we are clearly faced with a moral dilemma of some considerable proportions.

For a certain stigma, a certain impression of shamefulness and crime, does surely rest, in the mind of the average modern man, upon the memory of those who in past days were actively concerned in the great political proscriptions and reigns of terror. The proscriptions of Marius and Sulla, the wholesale political executions of Augustus and the triumvirs, the persecution of the Christians, the Albigensian crusade, the Inquisition, Jeffreys's Bloody Assize, the slaughter under the Committee of Public Safety during the French Revolution, the ferocious repression of the 1905

Politics and Terrorism

rebellion under the Czars, none of these can be recalled by any ordinary person without at least some faint feeling of indignation, and if the same cannot yet be said of some other reigns of terror in which we ourselves and other nations of Western Europe have been more nearly concerned during the last century, the reason is not far to seek. For though contemporary indignation may be far more intense, it is an obvious truth that the public execration of these proscriptions only tends to become universal in proportion as the events recede into the past; the only atrocities which arouse the horror of all mankind are those committed in the course of obsolete controversies. For men's consciences are really far more elastic in these matters than it appears at first. It is not true that we always abstain from violence and cruelty, though it might be to our advantage; it is not even true that we compromise, and admit, as in the case of criminal repression, a small degree of terrorism in order to secure a great advantage, the overwhelming advantage of law and order, of public peace and a stable civilisation, but that at that point we draw the line. It will not do; self-flattery is too easy. We do indeed draw the line, but it is not that line. If it is true in general that nearly all of us instinctively disapprove of political terrorism, and that for these acts we reject the justification of expediency, we are obliged to confess that our disapproval is of a kind which can be bought off, our shrinking from those violences is capable of being completely numbed by the action of moral anaesthetics. For the only expediency we definitely and unanimously reject is a dead expediency, an expediency that serves purposes and passions which are not our own. Where violence is, or seems to be, essential to our own existence, or to the existence of any community or cause with which, however gratuitously, we have identified ourselves, the most part of

This Russian Business

us can always be brought by suitable propaganda to approve of violence. If all men condemn the proscriptions of Sulla, it is because we care nothing for the preservation of that dictatorship; what is Sulla to us? So with the proscriptions of the triumvirs, so with the persecution of Christianity; we are not partisans for Octavian and Antony, nor can we approve that martyrs should be crucified to vindicate the authority of a vanished empire. When it comes to execrating the Inquisition and the French Terror, we are not quite so unanimous even now; and this is obviously because those controversies are not yet dead; the Catholic and the republican take, and we find it natural for them to take, a considerably milder view of the moral enormity of those happenings than the Dutch Lutheran or the royalists of the *Action Française*. The nearer we come to our own times, the more acute the controversy, the more generally all of us have taken sides, the more doubtful and partial becomes the moral indignation aroused by public violence. The executions after the Easter rebellion in Ireland, the massacre of Amritsar, the military decimation after the mutiny at Singapore, these and a dozen other instances out of extremely modern history have indeed aroused a good deal of passionate moral indignation, but it has been almost wholly confined to that part of the people who sympathised with the politics or religion of the sufferers. Or if some quiver of compunction did affect the nerves of the rest of the nation, the public conscience was rapidly soothed by official explanations and the forgetful passage of time. Nor need we suppose that other nations are any better than we; there are even some reasons to think that the colonial repressions of France and Italy find a public at home even more apathetic than ours. Nor is it only that the scale of these occurrences is minimised, for in every such case there is to be found an active part of public opinion which not

Politics and Terrorism

only fails to condemn, but even squarely supports and approves such actions.

If nevertheless the almost unanimous opinion of mankind insists on condemning the political repressions of bygone days, this is perhaps not so inconsistent as it seems. For the same guiding principle implicitly underlies all these judgments. We do not hold a different view of the moral undesirability of the acts we condemn and those we are disposed to tolerate. It is in the justification that the difference lies. We cannot admit the excuse of expediency unless we ourselves feel the ends sought to be expedient; we agree that at a pinch the material order of things should be saved by some sacrifice of the moral order, but only such a material order as we ourselves approve of or sympathise with. For considerable numbers of us even that is not enough. We still disapprove, though more mildly, the over-violent self-defence even of historical régimes with which we do sympathise; to secure our whole-hearted consent to deterrent action of a violent kind the régime must be that with which we are ourselves identified. The State must be saved at any cost, but only the State on which our own existence depends; if former times or foreign nations will take the same responsibility on themselves, let them look to it; they shall have none of our countenance; right is right and wrong is wrong; if our own house is in peril, we will do wrong if need be, but we will not burden our consciences with erecting that wrong into a principle for the sake of strangers.

The Russian Revolution is so near us not only in time but in direct appeal to our passions, that almost the whole of the politically minded populations of Europe may be said to identify themselves in a considerable degree with one or other of the contending parties. The strife of rich and poor, the few against the many, the Capitalist order

This Russian Business

against the Socialist order—these are the deepest and most real cleavages in every civilised society. Therefore almost all of us either affirm and condemn the Red Terror, on the one hand, or deny and justify it on the other. Those who desire to condemn naturally make the most of the facts, or even, as their opponents suggest, conjure up out of the void such facts as would lend themselves to condemnation. The defensive party, equally naturally, begin by reducing the facts to a minimum or denying them altogether, and only so far as this effort is judged to have failed do they attempt the more complicated task of justification. And even then justification is not always a pure discussion of principle; it often resolves itself into an argument whether the kettle is not blacker than the pot, after all. We hear more of the Menshevik terror, the White Terror in Hungary, the White Terror in Finland, the slaughter by the Czars, the Kolchak atrocities, the deeds of Denikin and Wrangel, the murder campaigns against Communist leaders, and the misdeeds of the Capitalist West, than of any fair and square justification of terror on moral or even political grounds. But when the direct defence does come, it rests, as it always must rest, on the same deep principle of mere self-preservation. The Revolution is in danger, the Revolution must be saved; no other way will save it. As some American writer once said: "a Reign of Terror is all right, provided it's your own side that's doing it." The wording of that statement may be somewhat extravagant, but it is not as cynical as it looks, or if it is cynical, then cynicism is an ineradicable element of what we have hitherto been pleased to call our consciences. For surely the sober opinion of almost all mankind boils down to something not so very different.

It may be of course that all violence, whatever its motive, is wrong, fatally and dreadfully and inevitably wrong, that

Politics and Terrorism

to impose any forcible constraint on one's fellow-man, and still more to take his life, is a thing to be refrained from at any cost whatever, and, in short, that violence, however small, is a means that no end, however great, can possibly justify. And there are pacifists and quietists and non-resisters enough who do really and honestly feel like that. But the overwhelming majority of mankind surely do not take that view. They will not go so far. And the moment one refuses to go the whole way, it becomes a mere question of proportion between the means and the end. Nearly all of us really believe that the end does justify the means. And pretty well every man Jack of us will in his heart approve of terroristic methods, or any other bloody and violent action, as a means to an end, on two conditions. The first is that the means must not be too startling or too sudden. If our nerves are to be shocked, it must be done by homœopathic doses. For instance, the shooting of Roger Casement at the beginning of the last war was a far more startling event than the execution of dozens of spies a year or two later, though the justification in theory was the same. And it is pretty safe to say that the news of the first few hundred casualties in the field at the beginning of the war made a far deeper impression on the minds of ordinary people in England than far more wholesale slaughter later on. But of course the main thing is the justification: the *end* must be one of which we approve. And this is surely the right principle, and the only right one. When once you have made up your mind which course is right and which is wrong, the moral complexion of your intermediate acts is necessarily coloured by the direction in which you travel: there is no correctness of demeanour which will enable you to travel virtuously the primrose path. To affect a moral impartiality is absurd, and worse than absurd. There is no conceivable attitude so cynical or so

This Russian Business

fundamentally and irreclaimably wicked as that which tries to be intellectually impartial between good and evil; which says that only your acts are to be considered, and not that purpose which gives them meaning, and that the only thing in the struggle you wage which has no moral importance whatever is the question whether your cause is right or wrong. Surely then it is after all true that no honest man can possibly justify any violence not committed by his own side (meaning by that the side he has freely chosen, not that to which he was born) and that the only question remaining for our honest man to decide is whether (though he approves the purpose and the end) the means may not still be too costly, or in other words, whether the means necessary to affect a certain purpose may not defeat some other far greater purpose. That may be opportunism; but by that opportunism all men live; there is no higher rule upon which any actual activity of human kind is based.

And in spite of all specious defences I am satisfied that if Socialism is a vain folly and a mirage on the steppes, then every man slain by the Bolsheviki must be thought to be slain in wantonness and wicked waste, when History at length casts up the mournful accounts of that adventure. But if the after world judges the accomplished fact, and finds that what these men painfully sought to do was worth doing, if they succeed, and if their success delivers the race of men from enormous evils hitherto suffered without any hope, will any ordinary man be then found so bold as to say the game was not worth the candle? Unless I greatly err, arm-chair criticism would in such a case shift its ground, and argue, not that the slaughter was wrong in itself, if it had been necessary, but that in fact it was not necessary, that the end could have been achieved without that.

Politics and Terrorism

The most urgent end to be achieved by a revolutionary Government is to survive, to get opportunity and elbow room, to ensure itself at least a trial, a fair chance to carry on the work of building its new world (if worlds *can* be built on any such plan); in one word, to save the revolution from its enemies. You may have your own private notions as to whether the revolution is worth saving, but that is a matter you can hardly expect its adherents to waste much thought over; they would not be its adherents unless they had settled that matter with their consciences long ago. So far the Russian Revolution has survived, and seemingly grown and prospered. It is obviously hard at work, with its coat off and its back bent; but its new world is in the building. It is far too early to judge the human worth of its achievement, and till we can judge that, it is too early to spend much time in criticising the manner or the incidents of that building, or in crying shame upon the cost.

XVIII

The Use of Force

WHEN THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION with the revolving years establishes itself so firmly that the last hope of shaking it from its seat is abandoned, or else gives way and goes altogether to pieces, thus becoming either respectable enough or dead enough for history to be written about it, not the least curious chapter will be the story of the evolution and metamorphoses of contemporary criticism, especially Press criticism. For the last fifteen years Russia has been fairly steadily in the limelight, often a subject for the front page and double headlines, almost always worth publicity of some kind. The news has of course varied in volume from time to time, but the comment and criticism have flowed in a much steadier stream. In fact, the Revolution may fairly be considered a perfect godsend to the Press. But of course it had its drawbacks. There were times when the matter was too abundant; the vein was too rich. It was hard to know what to say, what was the proper line to take. Of course one thing was always clear: that the Press, or to be more accurate the interests that owned and paid the Press, did not like the Revolution. But you cannot keep on filling columns and columns for months on end just with the bald statement that you do not like this or that movement or country. Some decent circumstantiality is expected; you must have a whole apparatus of arguments and reasons ready before the campaign is unleashed. And it is not so simple, not where the thing you attack is new and comparatively unknown. If you have orders to write against, say, the Catholic Church, or the French Republic, or the Conservative Party, or Christian Science, or Dar-

The Use of Force

winism, it is easy enough. There are certain pretty well recognised lines of attack, and if you stick to those you cannot go far wrong; it is at least fairly easy to keep from contradicting yourself. But where you have to write against a brand-new, unknown, half-monstrous thing like a Socialist revolution, which changes into a hundred Protean shapes and alters its whole complexion before your ink is dry, the business becomes far more complicated. Especially as the nature of the case requires you to be always cocksure of your opinions. When you are on the defensive, you can afford to be modest, and to entertain reasonable doubts; but when you are leading an offensive campaign you are obliged to be positive and slashing all the time.

The first propaganda against the Russian Government almost went as far as to deny its existence. It was not really what one could call a Government. There was no order of any sort in Russia, and no settled administration, only a gang of cut-throats who had temporarily got hold of the public power, much as a gang of Chicago bandits might be in control of a bank for a few hours. It was not necessary to consider the doctrines or pretensions of the Bolsheviki, simply because their power was so obviously evanescent, an anomaly as absurd as it was dreadful, a tragic and ridiculous interlude, which the iron pressure of events would displace to-morrow, or the day after at the very latest. The European Cabinets would not recognise it even as a Government *de facto*; it was there as large as life, but they ignored it, and secretly organised rebellions against it. And when Wrangel captured a town or two in the Ukraine, the French Government rashly recognised him and his friends as the *de jure* Government of all the Russias. So far, the Press theory about the situation was vindicated by the support of the powers that be.

But as the months and the years went by, and the inter-

This Russian Business

vention collapsed, and the Czarist generals scuttled to cover, it became painfully clear that this theory was all wrong, that there *was* a Government in Russia past all doubt or denial, and a strong Government too, evidently a pretty stable Government, as Governments went in those uneasy times. The Press took note of these things, and the line of attack changed. The leading articles ceased to say "It cannot last, it cannot last!" and almost to leave it at that, as they had formerly done. They began to say "It may last, more or less, but it can never be a success. The Government is a military despotism, and military despotisms may last for generations, or for ages. But all the time it lasts the people of Russia will live in misery. A Socialist State, so-called, may perhaps be maintained indefinitely by force, but as Socialism is economically nonsensical and absurd, it will be maintained, if at all, in a country permanently on a standard of living inhumanly low, and constantly on the verge of famine. And even at that of course it won't really be Socialism; it isn't even now."

Then came the obvious growth of economic reconstruction at a very rapid pace. By the time the Western world had realised the unmistakable character of this progress, and the fact that, to some extent at least, it already gave the lie to those dismal prophecies of misery and want, the process began to quicken before their eyes, and suddenly pointed towards an incredible climax with the setting forth of the Five Years Plan. This was too much. The Plan was received with incredulous laughter, as if it were clear that the Soviet Government, intoxicated with their first moderate successes, had now suddenly gone completely mad. But the first year of the Plan went by, while Europe held its breath (whenever it chanced to look that way), and then the second and third, and now even the fourth, and the amazing fact became crystal clear that so far, this enormous

The Use of Force

and maniac enterprise was succeeding. Consider what that meant. It meant, obviously, that the prophecies were not only wrong but silly, that the Socialist order could not only produce, but could produce and build, if need be, on a scale and at a rate undreamed of in all the history of the world up to that time.

When this startling fact had sunk into the minds of Western journalists, there was an immediate halt in the propaganda campaign; it became absurd and suicidal to continue it on the former lines. Out of many councils of war (as one may suppose) there came a complete change of the plan of campaign, and new watchwords and slogans were hastily brought into use. The new position was this: we never doubted that Socialism was practicable (this astounding assertion was printed almost textually in the *London Times*), but it is practicable only on one condition, namely, the enslavement of the workers. And these tremendous results that we now admit are being produced in Russia are due purely and simply to "forced labour." The Socialist worker does produce at a high rate, but he does it figuratively, if not literally, under the lash. Now this is not only very wrong, but it gives Russian industries an unfair advantage, and is bad for trade. We can't afford to allow that sort of thing. And gradually the whole mass of propaganda swung once more into line, and "forced labour" and "dumping" became the twin refrains of the new orchestration.

Now it is clear to all honest men that this new order in Russia will be justified, or the reverse, according as it lives up to, or fails to live up to, two requirements of very different kinds. First, it must produce, and more or less equitably distribute, a sufficient quantity of material commodities, food and clothes and houses and beer and chocolate and picture-shows and what not, to provide for the ordinary

This Russian Business

Russian a standard of life and comfort at any rate as good as he had under the Czars. And to justify itself in any worth-while degree it must do very much better than that; it must both ensure a far juster distribution of the national wealth, and (since Russia under the Czars was a very poor country) it must very considerably increase that wealth, before the new Russia will stand comparison, not with pre-war Russia (that would unhappily be comparatively easy), but with the civilised countries of the West. And the second requirement is this: that when the period of revolution and construction is over, and the material prosperity of the country is assured, there must be more, and not less, real individual liberty than there was before. And here again, if things are no better, or not much better, than under the Czars, the success achieved will hardly be worth the effort. To really justify the Revolution, the ordinary Russian must be assured of at least as much liberty as his brother in the West. And the Revolution will have achieved only a rather questionable kind of success unless the real liberty of the members of the Socialist State is very much greater than the extremely moderate liberty enjoyed by Western workers.

It is as yet far too early to judge how far either of these ends has been or will be achieved. The period of construction, the stage of tension and strained effort, is not yet finished. But assuming for the moment that the society to be constructed will eventually ensure a permanent raising of the standard of life and the standard of liberty, it is still a question worth considering how far the process of construction itself necessarily implies a temporary *lowering* of the standard in *both* those respects. Whether the standard *actually* sinks, in either case, below the pre-war Russian standard, or at any rate below the contemporary European standard, is a question of fact to be decided (some day) on

The Use of Force

positive evidence. But that there should exist a *tendency* to limitation and restriction both of material welfare and personal liberty, must surely be acknowledged by all sincere minds to be inherent in the very nature of the struggle. It is pretty clear that if you try to accumulate a working capital out of your ordinary income (which is what the Five Years Plan comes to) your income is thereby cut down. It may conceivably be expanded at the same time by other causes, by economies in working or what not, and as a result it may even be that you save up your capital without denying yourself any expenditure that you were used to. But even in that rather unlikely case the factor of restriction is still present and active, though its operation may be masked.

Similarly, if a large community is to hold together for a considerable time in some intense co-operative effort, this can obviously only be done at the expense of some sacrifice of individual liberty by its members during that period. And it is equally evident that this sacrifice cannot always be left solely to the individual conscience. Society may in its origin have been purely voluntary, but as we know it in this iron age it always and necessarily contains a compulsory element. The duties which the citizen owes to the commonwealth are duties which the commonwealth will and must enforce, if need be. In one sense, then, all co-operative labour is forced labour, as all compliance with law or custom is a forced compliance. There is always the sanction in the background. The question in any given case is how far it comes into the foreground as well. Does the latent power require to be exercised in one country or epoch more than in another?

Most of the stuff presented to the English newspaper reader about so-called "forced labour" and other forms of compulsion in Russia is so obviously mere cant that to

This Russian Business

discuss it seriously would be merely beating the air. And even of the more serious criticism a certain proportion is obviously partly due to a confusion of ideas. It is commonly said, for example, that there are prison camps in Siberia, where timber is felled and carted by convict labour, and this timber (it is assumed) forms part of the timber exported to England and elsewhere. It seems likely enough that all this is perfectly true. But it is extremely difficult to understand why Englishmen are expected to shudder at it. Is it that it is considered inhuman to make convicts work? When an English judge sentences a criminal to "hard labour" or to penal servitude, are those phrases without meaning, or does the man really do some work, and even some hard work, penal work, labour that really justifies the use of the word "servitude"? At any rate the general impression is that he does, and that being an English convict is not all beer and skittles. But then one hears strange stories of prisoners in timber camps who attempted to escape, and were shot down by the guards. It seems likely enough. I do not remember to have seen in this case any official admissions that such things have happened. But surely it is a case of *res ipsa loquitur*, as the lawyers say. If such a thing has never yet happened, that is surely a rather remarkable state of affairs, and even a very cautious man would probably be prepared to wager that if it has not happened, it will. But again, why should that rouse us to virtuous indignation? If a convict attempts to escape from Dartmoor, or from Sing Sing, or from Devil's Island, and a warder sees him, what will the warder do? Will he shoot, or not? Are we really expected to believe that he will confine himself to saying in a persuasive voice, "Now, now, you really mustn't do that"?

But there is rather more to it than that. The criticisms on this head are not all cant. There remains at least one ground of objection which has more substance in it. It seems to be

The Use of Force

the truth that at least part of those employed in hard labour in timber camps and such places are *political* prisoners, and not ordinary criminals. And it is suggested that this putting of political prisoners to servile labour is not only a clean break with all precedent, but is fundamentally and really an injustice and an outrage.

It is true that in most countries a distinction is observed (and was observed still more in the gentler times before the war) between the treatment of political and ordinary prisoners. But a candid judgment will be obliged to admit that there were always very grave limitations to this rule. To begin with, the distinction was one absolutely unknown to modern English law or to the practice of the English government. A prisoner in an English prison is put to work, or not, as the judge's sentence runs, but this has absolutely nothing to do with whether his crime was political or not. Take quite recent examples : on November 23, 1930, a Communist was sentenced to two years' hard labour for a purely political offence, and the judge announced that he would have sent the prisoner to penal servitude but for his youth. A little earlier a swindler who had been convicted of a cunning fraud in manipulating the balance-sheets of a public company was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment in the first division (without hard labour). Nor was there anything in the least unusual or out of the way about either of these sentences. So that if it is proper to treat political offenders more leniently, we that hold that view in England will have to begin by making revolutionary changes in our own law and practice, before we can with any decent grace criticise foreign Governments for commencing to do exactly what we have always done ourselves.

But it may of course be said that two wrongs do not make a right. Perhaps it is after all true that we ought to

This Russian Business

disapprove both what the Russians do and what we do ourselves, and that the only thing wrong with this part of the newspaper campaign about "forced labour" is that they ought to attack the English Government as well as the Russian, and to place Ramsay MacDonald and Baldwin in a common dock with Stalin and Molotoff. But it seems to me that there are quite enough good reasons for disapproving of Messrs. Baldwin and MacDonald without dragging in this very questionable ground of accusation.

After all, why shouldn't a political prisoner work? It has always been understood that he is liable to have a far worse thing done to him. In the last resort, political offenders are put to death. There is no country on earth which has not practised that rule in the past, or which will refrain from practising it in the future when the occasion arises. In most countries it is not often done nowadays in times of peace, but it is an extremely common thing in times of war or in case of insurrection. But if in principle a Government may go the length of taking a man's life, why all this fuss about making him put his hands to some useful labour?

Perhaps the real explanation lies in the history of political offences. In former times the only persons ever imprisoned for any length of time for political offences were nobles, members of the ruling caste. The common people did not meddle with politics, or if they did, they were either hanged out of hand or overlooked. The noble could not be overlooked, and if he was not beheaded he had to be kept safe somewhere or other. But he was not kept with common malefactors, or treated like them. He might be a prisoner, but he was still a gentleman, and was treated in a manner "befitting his rank." That old spirit survived clean into the last days of political imprisonment in pre-war Europe, and it is not dead yet. We do feel that to make a political

The Use of Force

prisoner work would be a sort of personal outrage, an insult, a degradation of his gentleman-like status. But it is hardly reasonable to expect that same rather snobbish attitude in a country where the dignity of manual labour is a fetish to which everyone pays at least lip-service, and where, apart from all possible question of cant or high-falutin theory, the manual worker is in actual indisputable fact a member of a privileged and dominant class.

But the practical-minded critic here interposes, and says that all that may well enough be true, but that principles don't matter twopence one way or the other. The real question is not whether the political prisoners are made to work. No doubt most politicians would be a lot better for doing some hard work now and then. The pity is that apparently the nature of things eliminates any chance of the treatment being applied simultaneously to the politicians on both sides. But the thing that does matter is whether the prisoners are being treated humanely while they work. Are they properly fed and housed and clothed, or aren't they? And *do* they work under the lash, or not?

There is no doubt that the practical man is quite right. These *are* the questions that really matter, and they are not political questions at all. But the trouble is that it is quite impossible to answer them. Between the venomous propaganda of the Western Press and politicians, directed to prove that Russian prison conditions (and all other Russian conditions) are unspeakably bad, and the counter-propaganda of Bolshevik apologetics, directed to prove that everything in Russia is inexpressibly excellent, there is little chance of you and me finding out the truth for some little time to come. One might take the black and the rose colour and (metaphorically) mix them together, to see what sort of nondescript hue would be produced in that way; and that is perhaps a fairly accurate metaphor of what

This Russian Business

many people really do do in such cases : they discount both stories to about the same extent, and (not without mis-giving) adopt the result provisionally as a working opinion. But the process is rather too mechanical to be even moderately safe. It is surely better to hold one's mind in suspense, to postpone judgment altogether for the present, as far as one's mind is capable of that extremely difficult operation. Especially as it is not at all vital for us to have an opinion on the subject immediately. We are not likely to do anything very decisive about it, even if we do form some rash opinion or other. To judge from the still fairly recent reports of the United States Commission on the administration of the criminal law, conditions in American prisons seem to be pretty bad. We are all very sorry to hear it. But we do not feel that it is our business. We shall not go to war with America about it. On the contrary, if we are sensible men, we shall confine ourselves to seeing that our own house is in order, and for the rest, we shall (indeed we must) trust to the humanity and good sense of the people of the United States, or the people of Russia as the case may be, and of their respective Governments, to see that whatever is manifestly wrong is put right. We have after all no grounds whatever for supposing that the Governments of either of these great countries consist of sadist maniacs or professional torturers. Or even if we are sufficiently neurotic to adopt that somewhat over-simple view of people whom we do not like, we should surely remain accessible to the consideration that if Russia employs prisoners at work on a large scale, it is probably with some idea of getting a good deal of work done. And if either economic history or common experience proves anything at all about labour and its results, it is that labour which is under-nourished, badly clothed, poorly sheltered, cold and ill-treated, only produces the merest fraction of the results

The Use of Force

to be got from labour which is properly treated and looked after. It can hardly be supposed that the Bolshevik Government is ignorant of this elementary fact, or that the men who somehow or other succeed in ruling one-sixth part of the globe are something very like half-wits! It will not do; it simply won't work. The Bolshevik leaders may be either wicked or stupid, but propaganda must surely make its choice. They cannot be both, or they would long ago have disappeared.

On the whole, therefore, we shall have to reckon this prison camp business amongst the lumber and rubbish which has to be cleared out of our minds before we can possibly attempt to judge whether Russian Socialism involves a loss of liberty, or even whether the present phase of the building-up of Socialism in Russia does at the moment involve a loss of liberty. Which is a rather different question, and a more practical one.

For my own part, I find it quite impossible to believe that this vast effort of construction goes on without any element of compulsion. It is impossible in the first place, because there is a certain amount of quite definite objective evidence, evidence admitted by everybody on both sides to be true, which proves the existence of an element of compulsion. And it is impossible in the second place, because human nature is not so made. No collective effort on a large scale has ever been exerted by any large community of mankind, without the dissentient minority being kept in line by force, either physical or moral. Either the unwilling or tardy members are made to toe the line by being dragged up to it by the scruff of the neck, or the same result is produced by a menacing hullabaloo of hooting and jeering. And moral force, the attack upon a man's will, can easily be far more atrocious than the physical attack upon his body.

This Russian Business

It is not easy to find an exact parallel in the history of a modern individualist State to the present collective effort of Russia towards the building of a new economic order. The reason for this is obvious. The very essence of a "Capitalist" or individualist State, the characteristic which makes it individualistic and not Socialist, is precisely that the State does not undertake any large collective enterprise in any field but one. It leaves such large-scale undertakings to private initiative. The only real exception is the case of war. In that one instance the State does act on the commonwealth's behalf, and it not only requires, but if need be forcibly compels, the co-operation of every member of the State, under penalties which in the extreme instance may involve even putting the recalcitrant member to death. The most obvious instance of this compulsory co-operation is personal military service. For more than a century the principle of conscription has been part of the public law of almost every State in Europe, and even Great Britain was forced to adopt the principle on the only occasion for a hundred years on which she has been engaged in a life and death struggle. And this is of course the extreme degree of interference with personal liberty. A soldier has no liberty whatever, and the physical conditions of his servitude are as harsh as can possibly be conceived. He is compelled to render exact and prompt obedience to the commands of his superiors. He is exposed to continual hardship; he suffers hunger, thirst, fatigue, and physical misery of every sort. He is exposed to continual danger of wounds, disease, and death, and to barely do what is universally thought to be his duty he must not only suffer these things in a passive way, but must actively press forward to meet them; he must exert a high degree of effort, fortitude, endurance, and courage. And if his soul does not answer these demands, if he shirks or hangs back

The Use of Force

or resists, he is liable to all kinds of forcible compulsion, and in the last resort to a shameful death.

And how is this tremendous servitude justified? It is justified by one consideration, and one alone: that of inexorable necessity. If the citizen does not rise to the height of this tremendous emergency, the State itself is in peril of dissolution. The citizen must sacrifice everything and must do everything, he must even die, in order that the community shall not die, in order that the national civilisation of which he is a member shall continue to exist in the way that he and his fellows conceived and framed it. And the same compulsion that lies upon the soldier in the field lies equally upon those who serve in other capacities at home: more especially on certain categories of citizens, on munition workers, on transport workers, and so on, but in principle, and if necessity arises, the same hard duty lies upon all without any exception.

Now according to Russian conceptions the Soviet State also, though not at war in the military sense, is obviously engaged just now in a life and death struggle. The whole conception of national life and economy is at stake. If its plan of construction fails through treachery or slackness, the State itself fails. Failure means revolution, famine, civil war, probably military intervention by foreign Powers. Can it be wondered at that the use of force to compel co-operation to carry out discipline, to prevent wrecking, or any kind of active or passive resistance to the national purpose, is regarded as a thing obviously justified by that same plea of imperious necessity which every State relies on in time of open war? And it can hardly be doubted or denied that the Soviet conception of the vital urgency of the situation, from its own point of view, is objectively true. The very existence of the Soviet State is undoubtedly at stake. A signal failure in the constructive effort means the

This Russian Business

death of Russia as Russia now exists. It is idle to say that we should like Russia to die, that we should prefer some other Russia to supplant it, to rise phoenix-like from its ashes. Always, even in case of war, it is above all the established order in a State that seeks to ensure its own survival, that lays upon the citizen the duty of protecting it. You cannot expect a State to commit suicide, or to connive by slackness at its own destruction, simply because you do not like that kind of State.

How far the Russian Government has actually found it necessary to exert any forcible compulsion on any of its citizens is of course an entirely different matter. Logically, it might be possible that there should be no compulsion of any kind, physical or moral, that there should exist such practical unanimity as to make compulsion unnecessary and irrelevant. Or it might be (and this is still the orthodox anti-Bolshevik view) that the essence of the whole thing is compulsion, that the Russian Government consists of a handful of doctrinaire maniacs who, by sheer stark military force, bloody repression, and ruthless tyranny of all kinds, have for fifteen long years succeeded in forcing a hundred and fifty millions of people to travel against the grain a road that almost all of them loathed, and in these latter years to exert tremendous energies to ensure the continuance of their own servitude.

But of course neither of these stories will wash. Reasonable men, believing the Russians, whom they do not know very well, to be probably men pretty much like themselves, will not be likely to accept either version as the truth, or even as an honest attempt at the truth. It is fairly clear for all practical purposes that in the main the mass of the Russian people is, and always has been, behind the Bolshevik Government, supporting it against counter-revolution, and ready to defend it in case of external war.

The Use of Force

It is equally clear not only that a minority (probably a very small though very energetic minority) is at irreconcilable enmity with that Government and all its purposes, but also that a much more considerable section of the population accept and even in a sense support the Government purely and simply because it is the established order, in the same way as they would accept every other established order, on the principle of rendering unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, or in other words, because that is the course of least resistance. There is a good deal of positive evidence on both these points, but even if there were none at all both statements are obviously pretty legitimate deductions from two plain facts. The first is the fact that from time to time various attempts have been made to overthrow the established order, ranging from the earlier civil wars on the grand scale to petty tumults here and there at odd times. And the second and still more significant fact is the rapidity and apparent ease with which the Government has always succeeded in vindicating its authority. A purely tyrannical Government, or even a really unpopular Government, seldom gets the best of its inveterate enemies with quite such ease, if these are very numerous or if the general population sympathises with them. But on this head there is one more fact so significant as to be conclusive to ordinary minds, and that is that the Five Years Plan up to a point has obviously succeeded, even if we refuse to admit that it has already been completed in all its details. Now the Plan involved enormous difficulties and very heavy sacrifices, and it clearly could not have succeeded in any measure worth talking about without a continuous effort, a steady lift on the part of the great mass of the population during four long years, without a fairly general spirit of enthusiasm and comradeship at times and in places almost approaching the heroic scale. And you cannot produce that kind of thing

This Russian Business

by the mere application of force or threats or even terror. A cowed population may be reduced by those means to a sullen and passive acquiescence, but to suppose that any population forced to labour against the grain will exhibit rare qualities of energy and enthusiasm in the performance of that labour, is to betray a lamentable ignorance of ordinary human nature.

It is sometimes said, however, that the Russian populace may not be constrained to support the Government, at least not in general, but that they are deluded by false promises of what is to follow. Well, they may be deluded. No one can deny that possibility, and if the critics were content to leave it at that, no one could reasonably object. But then again one must obviously suspend judgment. The only time when false promises can be clearly seen to be false is surely the time when they are due to be fulfilled, and that time is still some way off, say a year or two at the least. If the Western propagandists will agree to wait till then before they condemn the Russian experiment, I think the average man in the street would be content to refrain from any approval in the meantime. And if the politicians and journalists of Western countries were content to stand back and give Russia breathing-space and fair play, and a reasonable chance to work out her own salvation or damnation by her own efforts, without trying to influence the result by barracking or breaking the ring, without trying to cripple Russian external trade because it is Russian (or rather because it is Socialist) and without creating by vicious propaganda a mass psychology in the West (and in the Far East) in favour of warlike intervention in case any likely pretext should offer; why, in that case it would be much easier for a good many more or less disinterested persons to admit their own misgivings, and to try to form some reasonable opinions both as to what is really being

The Use of Force

achieved in Russia and as to what is the price that is being paid and that must still be paid after the tale is fully told.

For after all it is not purely a Russian question. If Russia succeeds in this enterprise before all men's eyes, nothing on earth is more humanly certain than that the same enterprise will sooner or later be attempted in the West. And of course that is the rub. That is what really explains the viciousness of the attack on Russia. The paymasters of Western propaganda do not want that attempt to be made, for very good reasons of their own. And the partial half-way success (even if it be no more) of the Five Years Plan has, to use an Americanism, "got them rattled." Many of them honestly believe the experiment is in any case doomed to failure; but then one never knows: there is always the element of doubt. And the unwelcome doubt that obstinately rises in one's own mind is always the doubt one combats most fiercely when one encounters it in the outside world. The Five Years Plan, and every other such plan, may be doomed to fail anyway, but Western finance will not take the risk if it can help it.

And of course the trouble is that this test case that is being fought out in Russia, this *experimentum in corpore vili*, is by general consent, in one way, a pretty conclusive test. That is, it would be conclusive if it succeeded. By all theory, including all Socialist theory hitherto, an industrially undeveloped, mainly agricultural country, like Russia, is *a priori* the least hopeful soil for a Socialist experiment that could well be imagined. According to the pundits, Socialism ought to have come first in Germany, say, or England or France, for these countries have already that elaborate industrial organisation which Socialist theory presupposes, and which in Russia has to be built up out of the void. If then the Socialist theory of the State looks like succeeding

This Russian Business

even in Russia, a single successful experiment begins to wear the aspect of a conclusive demonstration.

All the West feels that, and it is for this reason that Russia looms so large in everybody's thoughts, and so much preoccupies the attention of both friends and enemies. It is not a question of forced labour or slavery or dumping or atrocities, or even of Russian propaganda for world revolution. The only Russian propaganda that is worth twopence, and the only kind that any intelligent supporter of the established capitalist order really fears, is the propaganda of success. If the Russian experiment breaks down in Russia after a reasonable trial, the moral defeat will be so crushing that no Socialist propaganda anywhere will be worth twopence for half a century to come. But if that experiment succeeds, then propaganda will be almost superfluous. It will be a case of *res ipsa loquitur*, and there is no political force in Europe or America strong enough to prevent the triumph of the Socialist cause in all those nations, and the setting on foot of a fresh trial of the same attempt.

And if that is at all true, it is surely in the interest of reasonable and disinterested people everywhere, no matter which side they are inclined to take in this enormous and extremely doubtful controversy, to insist that this huge laboratory experiment shall be carried through to the end without any smashing of the instruments, or any intimidation of the workers, or any deliberate confusing of the records upon which the eventual conclusion will have to be based.

It is perhaps true that the anti-Russian propaganda campaign, in spite of the enormous expansion and increased intensity which the Five Years Plan has provoked, does to some extent visibly improve in quality; it has come almost perforce to contain a more realist element, to strike

The Use of Force

a sincerer note; it tends, though slowly, to become more matter-of-fact and to come more into the open. There is rather less moral indignation nowadays, and rather more honest complaint about real or imaginary damage to trade. And the campaign is increasingly addressed rather to the present and the future than to the past. We do not harp as much as we once did on the shameful refusal of the Revolution to repay the money which the Czar borrowed (a good deal of it) for the purpose of suppressing the Revolution, nor even on the real or imaginary atrocities of the Cheka. We rather tend to lower the pitch of our complaint, even if we complain as loudly and steadily as we ever did. We may not altogether abandon the high apocalyptic tone, the horrified invocation of heavenly wrath, but we are coming to specialise in more prosaic and less sensational topics, such as these comparatively pedestrian matters of forced labour and dumping. No doubt (for the moment, and until the next Zinovieff letter) we have become a shade more reasonable than America, which still refuses for righteousness' sake to have any diplomatic relations with a country so fundamentally sinful, while at the same time for business reasons she does more trade with Russia than any other country on earth. The requirements of abstract righteousness are fortunately fairly easy to meet. It is enough to refuse to know the wrongdoer socially. You need not refuse to take his money. And yet we can hardly afford to be superior about that, so long as our own propaganda so deftly rings the changes on the twin notes of forced labour and dumping. For we are indignant about forced labour for the Russians' sake, out of pure philanthropy and compassion for our neighbours' wrongs; but our indignation about dumping is a different matter; that portion of our charity begins and ends at home. And unfortunately these two motives of wrath

This Russian Business

tend to get mixed one with another, and it is not always clear whether we should be content at a pinch to put up with dumping, unfair competition in trading, if the products in question were not tainted at the source by slave labour, or whether we should perhaps overlook the alleged moral taint, if it were not that the products are dumped. All this propaganda is double-edged; which edge is it that really cuts its way through the habitual indifference of the general public? Should we really take so much interest in all these stories of forced labour in Russia, if it were not for the suggestion that the cheap products of this labour undersell our own products in the markets of the world, and even in our own market? There is forced labour of sorts (not convict labour either) in the French colonies, and the British colonies too. And the very words of the colonial mandates from the League of Nations (that fount and well-spring of international righteousness) expressly allow forced labour in the mandate colonies for certain purposes. But we don't make much of a fuss about that. The papers are not full of it; no tumult of moral indignation rises to heaven. But then forced labour in the colonies does no damage to European trade. The average man would feel a good deal more comfortable about this international purity campaign if it were not for a certain uneasy feeling that the campaigners have perhaps an axe to grind.

XIX

When Bolshevism Fails

ONE CANNOT help wondering sometimes, amid all this clash of propaganda and counter-propaganda, what the opposing parties would do if one or the other were suddenly completely victorious, what it is that each of them really wants to happen in Russia. In the case of the Communists it is, I suppose, clear enough—they want the Communist power to go on being Communist, ever more and more Communist, as Communist as possible. But what do the anti-Communists want? What would the propagandists of Western Europe really like to be done? Of course they would want the Soviet Power overturned; well and good, let us overturn the Soviet Power. But what next? Do they want the Czarism back? It is surely pretty safe to say that (in spite of Winston Churchill) even the neurotic and war-maddened Europe of these days would never willingly suffer that nightmare again. We may have learned little or nothing from all these tempestuous years, but on the other hand, there are some things that we can hardly have forgotten. But what else is there? Probably the average politician or newspaper owner, and also the average newspaper reader, so far as he gives it a thought at all, has vaguely in mind that some sort of bourgeois republic or constitutional monarchy would be a good sort of thing to have in Russia, something that we could understand, as much like our own kind of government as possible, with just a Russian flavour to it—perhaps Kerensky might be given another chance, or if not, perhaps one of the better class of exiled grand dukes might serve a turn; he could be given some fatherly advice and a highly ornamental crown, and then

This Russian Business

there could be a Duma strong enough to prevent him making himself into a Czar. And the new régime could be started off with a bit of a loan (to be added to the debts which the Bolsheviks repudiated) and—and then we could think about something else, and perhaps it would work all right. And if not—well, what can you do? They are queer people, these Russians.

Try as one may, any scheme of that kind, any vision of a shandy-gaff bourgeois parliamentary system working in Russia, always seems unreal and fanciful in the last degree. It will not come alive, even in thought. It is too late. So long as the Soviet Power was just as newfangled as the Provisional Government which it supplanted, it was easy enough to believe in a mere turning of the tables between those two. But in the meantime the Communist Government has settled down and made itself at home, the régime has body and substance, it has struck deep roots down into reality and acquired a prescriptive right to existence, while its immediate predecessor is more and more the pale ghost of something that might have been. There are plenty of Russian parties, so-called, which are prepared to claim for themselves the inheritance of Bolshevism, if Bolshevism could only be persuaded to die. But they hate each other almost as much as the Soviet Power, they have no common doctrine, no conceivable basis of amalgamation; and what is worse, they have pretty obviously no support in the country. The Bolsheviks had very little of that when they started, but then they have been in power for fifteen years, and have acquired weight and legitimacy by the sheer physical fact of survival. It is becoming more and more obvious, even to those who hate the established order above all things, that it is quite definitely an established order, that it has at least the fundamental virtue of stability; and it is becoming equally clear that if and when it is over-

When Bolshevism Fails

thrown, it would be folly to hope for any equally stable Government on the other side to step immediately into its place. One candidate there is with perhaps some chance of success, the Czardom. But obviously even a restored Czardom would not stand where it did before the war, or even before the Revolution. Its prestige has been smashed. The "period of prescription" has been broken. Everything would have to be started again from the beginning. A military despotism of that kind may endure for a long time as long as it has unbroken tradition behind it, even though the despots are men of fifth-rate capacity. But after fifteen years, and fifteen years of Communist propaganda too, it is a far different matter. Majesty rules by right divine, and it is a very effective way to rule. But Majesty returning after exile is not nearly as majestic; there is always a slight flavour of imposture about its pretensions; it has been found out. It can hardly re-establish its former claim to divine appointment; it is too obvious that either there is some hanky-panky, or the divinity is fickle, which is just as bad. Monarchies live by prestige far more than by actual power; but second-hand monarchs have no prestige, they must be maintained by sheer force, and their command of that is not always adequate. If the civil wars which would naturally follow a Bolshevik breakdown produced a general of first-class military genius, a Muscovite Napoleon, no doubt he might re-establish the empire of the Czars at least for a decade or two. But military geniuses are few and far between. And nothing less will do, if the past is any guide. Kolchak and Denikin and Judenitch and Wrangel all had their chance. All of them had strong outside support, and some of them seem to have had respectable military talents, but they made a poor showing. If no Napoleon *ex machina* comes upon the scene, it is perhaps no very rash guess to prophesy a long stalemate. At least

This Russian Business

it has almost always been so, when an established régime goes down in violence, and there is no heir with overwhelming claims and the command of preponderating force. The succession is too tempting a prize not to be fought for, and in such a case everybody starts from scratch, so to speak. Anybody's fight is often nobody's fight. After the Roman Republic, civil wars. After the Chinese Empire, civil wars. After the Bolsheviks, chaos. In a vast and loose conglomeration like Russia, with many races and a dozen languages, and a territory that sprawls over two continents, the need of some strong central order, the danger of utter disintegration, are obviously far greater than in compacter and more homogeneous States. There were formerly many men of liberal mind who loathed the Czardom, but who felt that it ought to be tolerated simply because it was there, and was able to fend for itself, because the order which it represented stood between Europe and worse evils. And thoughtful Europeans of our own times, however anti-Socialist or anti-Soviet they may be in principle, may well be driven one of these days into facing the same kind of dilemma, even into the definite decision that they had rather Bolshevism should win through, than face the prospect of the vast catastrophe which would almost certainly be brought about by its fall. It is clear enough that its fall is still on the cards. If the Five Years Plan, or even the second Five Years Plan, unmistakably fails, or if the country is engaged in a first-class war before it succeeds, the storm may easily be too great for it to weather. But it is more and more certain that Bolshevism will not fall alone. It is too late for that. The soil and the soul of Russia are too deeply engaged in this enormous adventure. If that tremendous effort comes utterly to naught, a period of exhaustion must follow. It is not in mortals to begin again so soon, or to move mountains twice in a generation;

When Bolshevism Fails

there is no possible residue of energy which can be reasonably looked to for the heroic task of holding together Russia's welter of nations and babel of discordant tongues. It is difficult to imagine any necessary limit to as great a disaster. If once the Soviet Power goes under, then perhaps all Russia sinks back into the abyss. Once already the whole country seemed on the point of disintegration, and Russia, the territory governed by the Bolsheviki at their first beginning, shrank almost to the size of the mediaeval Muscovite dukedom. The country was saved from dissolution for that time, and the strong hand of the Soviet Power again united under the rule of Moscow the vast bulk of the former territory of the Czars. But there again it would be too much to expect so great an effort twice in the same generation. It is hard to believe that even a united Russian nation on the grand scale could again survive a shock of that kind. The overwhelming chances surely tend the other way. It seems a much more likely issue that (if the Soviet Power goes down) there will break over the wearied land a continual tempest of paltry wars after the Chinese model, destroying all that is European or national in Russia, and probably ending in the permanent Balkanisation of a sixth part of the globe. And if these gloomy chances come to pass, it will be a disaster almost without precedent or parallel since the ruin of Rome and the barbarian invasions. All the slow past of the Russian land will be cancelled in a matter of months; the centuries will be rolled up like a scroll, and the Cossack and the Tartar may mount again and ride into the West.

All this may of course be pure moonshine; but if it is impossible and absurd to dogmatise about the political developments even of the immediate future, it is equally absurd, and far more perilous, to refuse to take account of the probable course of events merely because something

This Russian Business

different might happen. Certainly nothing can ever be safely anticipated; the only inevitable events in history are those whose inevitability historians of an after time have deduced from the mere fact that they happened, and if it had chanced otherwise, those other chances would also have been dressed up in the borrowed garments of fatality. None the less, there are certain probabilities, certain risks which no prudent man will run if he can help it, and if he is determined to run them he does well to count the cost beforehand. It may be that it is better for the capitalist West to leave Bolshevism alone, rather than risk those other perils which are likely enough to threaten Europe upon its dissolution. It may be on the other hand that the interests of the Capitalist order demand the expenditure of the last ounce of effort for the destruction of Bolshevism, no matter what the consequences might be. But Europe is older than either of these antagonists, and will, as most men hope, survive even the victor in this struggle; and there is a growing feeling even amongst the nominal supporters of Things as They Are that they would rather not see this ancient and still vigorous civilisation wantonly torn to pieces merely for the sake of stamping out a heretical doctrine of political economy. The time for Crusades is past; nowadays there is no longer any such faith in the divine inspiration of social and political orthodoxy.

After Bolshevism Succeeds

THE FUTURE belongs to the young, provided always that there are any young, and that there is any future for them to inherit, two conditions which are not as much a matter of course as they seem. We have heard of men who were born old; it is a thing that happens now and then to whole generations. And as to the future, if those now newly grown to manhood in the greater part of Europe are to find before they are old a world worth living in, it is high time that things began to mend a little.

We know all about the post-war generation. But we do not always realise that in Russia the same generation is in at least as deep a sense post-Revolution. Time slips by, and one forgets that there are already young men and girls, millions on millions of them, who have never known any Russia but Communist Russia, and millions more who began their intelligent lives with the war, and whose first experience of life in a normal order of things was of life under the Soviet Power. These are the Russian post-war generation, but in many ways it has little in common with its contemporaries except the mere tale of years. Its roots are the same and yet not the same; its spiritual inheritance is of an opposite kind. With us the war shattered everything, and the new life grew up surrounded by a world in ruins. In its very cradle it was war-weary and world-weary, prematurely old, knowing that all is vanity and vexation of spirit; and all the glory of its dawn was clouded by that sombre and desperate knowledge. It is a tragic thing for youth to know (or to think it knows) in advance that life is mostly worthless and hopeless, and that there is no

This Russian Business

new thing under the sun, to feel that it has no future that is worth any sacrifice, and to have no reasonable course open but to drug itself with jazz and cynicism, sex and noise and nonsense.

In Russia the case is different. To the Russians the war was the same bloody shambles as for the rest of the world, but the atmosphere of horror was never heightened by an atmosphere of humbug, of cynical imposture unmasked when it was too late. The war was not something that was to make the world safe for democracy, and which unaccountably failed to do it; it was not something that should produce a new spirit between the classes, cause the rich and the poor to understand each other better, and transform the scarred face of Europe into a land fit for heroes to live in. Those disillusionments the Russians have not suffered, partly because nobody thought of spinning just those fantasies for their benefit, but, of course, chiefly because they had something else to think of. In Russia the war does not fill the horizon of the immediate past in the same way as with us; it does not loom as large. Apart from the sheer physical destruction it caused, the war was only important as having in a sense cleared the way for the Revolution; it was the last wild, disastrous orgy of imperialism, the explosion in which the old order destroyed itself. Against that fiery and senseless background the living Revolution rises, enormous, dynamic, full of meaning and purpose. For Russian youth the Revolution is not as much the end of the old régime as the beginning of the new; it is the very life they live, the atmosphere they breathe; its face is set forwards, it presses on to an undiscovered future. Whatever else Russians may be, it is not easy for them in this age to be decadents, *fin de siècle*, agnostics in the matter of living. The stage is not set for that; these are far different times. If it is true that optimism and pessimism

After Bolshevism Succeeds

go in waves, they have been born, they feel, upon the upward lift, or at least the trough was passed before they felt their strength.

This boundless enthusiasm of Russian youth is a commonplace of all observers, but not everybody looks on it as a hopeful sign. This, cry one class of critics, this is the grand illusion, this ruinous expectation of impossible things, this raising of fallacious hopes to levels undreamt of by any folly hitherto. For in reality there is no such future as they look forward to, the whole thing is impossible and insane, a bubble blown up and dancing in the sunlight; and the greater the enthusiasm, the higher their hopes are lifted, the more desperate will be the inevitable disaster, the darker the ineluctable despair. In spite of their apocalyptic tone, nobody can say for certain that such warnings will never be verified. The risks are enormous; the sheer abyss yawns to left and right; and there is no turning back. But it was always so. Every great human effort plays with tragic chances; the forward road is always beset with danger. But the human spirit presses forward none the less, and even if all fails, surely the effort and the eager pressing forward are worth something for their own sake. If everything in this new world-order turns out to be fundamentally wrong, if the whole great enterprise ends in unmitigated disaster on a scale hardly known before in human memory, this exaltation meanwhile, this positive lift and swing in the spirit of the new generations, will be something not negligible to set against that wreck. It can never be a vain or worthless thing that even one generation should live its youth through with its eyes on the stars and its face set towards the future. The stars may turn out to be will o' the wisps, and the future an ever receding mirage. Our own inert hopelessness may correspond to the inescapable and ultimate truth, and that universal rottenness in which

This Russian Business

we acquiesce may be the very texture of human fate. But even if, willy-nilly, Russia also comes at last to that dreary knowledge, it will always be something that she had (at long last) her youth and her time of unforgettable illusions, her brief moment of exultation in a joyous and not ignoble future. Something will still have been gained and kept beyond all losing; at the least, one more race of men will have spent its little time in courageous folly and gone out singing into the dark; one generation will have been saved from the mud.

There is an opposite kind of criticism, one perhaps most often heard on the lips of the clergy, but supported now and then by eminent politicians and other highly respectable and serious-minded persons. It is roughly this; that the new Russia is materialist and unmoral, that the new generation is without a soul, that the whole Communist movement tends towards the popularisation of a certain cynical egotism hitherto peculiar to the rich, towards a kind of proletarian Epicureanism. It is a criticism which is often enough applied to our own manners and morals, and is then usually received with a tolerant smile; one understands that the clergy have to talk like that; it is what they are there for. Here is a sample, culled from an unusually sympathetic article on Russia by a clerical visitor:

"... there is something sinister about that tremendous enthusiasm that one notices, that boundless hopefulness of Russian youth. They are too hopeful, or rather they are too satisfied with the hopes they have. It is perfectly clear that all their aspirations are on a purely material plane. They do not hope for, they do not even want, anything beyond material well-being. I do not blame them even for wanting that first, though I think that inverts the natural order of things. . . . But they do not seem to have any thoughts of spiritual welfare at all, even as a thing to come

After Bolshevism Succeeds

afterwards." I showed this article to Augustus. His verdict was at least definite. "Bosh!" he said. "Why *should* they want anything beyond physical well-being? That's what we're all after, isn't it? If those comfortable-looking clerics who talk like that have spent their lives pursuing something different from material well-being, they seem to have taken that in their stride as well, at any rate. Besides, the clergy can still go on preaching whatever they believe in to these people, even if they do get their earthly paradise. But that isn't what they want, of course. The real trouble is that the demand for felicity of any sort, human or super-human, depends more or less on how much you have got already. If the masses of people ever did get fairly comfortable in this life, it would spoil the market for those who trade in the life to come!"

This somewhat intemperate outburst rather impressed me, not because of its intrinsic merits (for it is clearly a mere irrelevant *argumentum ad hominem*) but because it was so obviously couched in the authentic Bolshevik style. It might have been lifted almost whole from a Russian "anti-religious" pamphlet. It is, in fact, the stock reply to that kind of criticism, and if it is a sound principle that people who do not practise what they preach should be prohibited from preaching, no doubt that reply will do well enough for practical purposes.

But of course the fact remains that so far as the criticism in question is an objective one, it is perfectly valid; there is no answer. If spiritual values, moral earnestness, all the higher part of human nature, do really depend upon the belief in a personal Deity and in human immortality, and even upon the guardianship of those beliefs being committed to an organisation of professional experts in religion (and it is this enormous assumption that all such criticism tacitly and quite honestly makes), then clearly the new

This Russian Business

generations in Russia care nothing for such values. But the premises of such an argument are surely rather too large, and the *argumentum ad hominem* in reply has after all a certain relevance, because of the evident fact that the same element is inherent in the original criticism. If I tell you that your way of life can have no moral values because you do not believe what I believe, you are clearly entitled to retort that my beliefs are false, and that my personal attack upon your morals therefore falls back upon my own head. No common ground is possible short of a plain admission that every earnest endeavour has its own moral atmosphere, every striving for the common good has its own set of spiritual values. But that is an admission which those in possession of dogmas which they regard as necessary to salvation can hardly be expected to make. Yet the impatience (or the smiling contempt) of the practical man for such arm-chair preaching has more than a merely practical justification. There is a deeply moral basis to his instinctive objection to idle people chattering to the man with tools in his hand. When something has to be done, the man who takes off his coat and does it is for the moment the only representative of the moral order, and the gentleman in black who gets in his way and presses tracts upon him (though they drip with wisdom) is quite evidently an instrument of the powers of darkness.

From any point of view, the obvious urgent material things have got to be done first. Even those who are convinced beyond all doubtings that men are spirits are still constrained to acknowledge that they are not disembodied spirits, and however austere the tribute due to the body may be limited, it is a tribute which has to come first. Until life itself is set on firm ground and made tolerable to live, the question of its ultimate purpose does not even arise. When you are escaping out of a shipwreck in a

After Bolshevism Succeeds

storm, you have no time to examine your conscience or to reflect on the deeper meanings of life; your job is to bail the boat and make the land; and if you can set about that in a hopeful spirit, it will probably better your chances. So it is now in Russia. The people of that country are engaged in a task of material construction so great as perhaps to be beyond all human strength, but which at any rate means years of tense struggle. When that is well over, the curious foreigner may with better grace settle himself in his arm-chair and begin to consider what has been won and lost.

Yet of course it is clear enough from the beginning, in a certain sense, that youthful enthusiasm, however glorious and heartening, will never have the last word. The middle-aged know better, most unhappily for themselves, and in these stirring times they never quite catch the universal fervour. They consent, they subscribe, they hope, they even work, but always with mental reservations. They cannot forget even in the fire and glow of sunrise that, if not in the material affairs of men, at any rate in their minds and aspirations, there comes an inevitable afternoon. The ineluctable truth is that reality will never answer all these hopes, that the promises of youth cannot be paid in full, that even though all things may fall out according to our utmost wish, there will still be no such high and lasting joy, no such deep indestructible satisfaction, as we promised ourselves in the morning.

No doubt in twenty years' time the Socialist youth of Russia will know the taste of that salt truth, and perhaps even the generation that is young in that day will see its own future through a more sombre air than that which their fathers breathed. But the fact that a certain discouragement may be inevitable is surely no reason for wilfully anticipating it. Great enthusiasms run in cycles,

This Russian Business

in slow mountainous waves, with centuries between one high lift and the next. These are the golden times of the human race; they make all the rest worth while. No doubt hopes then rise to impossible heights, but if hopes were not sometimes too high, performances would perhaps be lower than they need be. Those happy enough to be on the crest are not conscious of this wave-like flux and reflux; but this is a salutary thing, for half their strength is in their unconsciousness. Faith moves mountains, but only a perfect faith. The critical spirit is out of place in those who are called to great actions. It is for the less fortunate onlooker to note with a subdued exaltation the rising curve which sweeps upwards towards that height, and to divine with a tempered regret the descending curve, the reaction which may lead to a tamer and more pedestrian future, but which can never cancel the heroic moments of the past.

And in Russia as elsewhere we may admit that the descending curve is inevitable. There is bound to be a reaction of sorts some day, and that not only if Bolshevism now breaks down. If that happens, there clearly threatens a storm more violent than any hitherto, perhaps long years of anarchy, perhaps the restoration of the despotism of the Czars, in either case a disaster so deep and far-reaching that even the sworn and chief enemies of Bolshevism shrink back before the prospect, and hope against reason for some middle way. But suppose even that no such thing comes to pass, suppose (and at this moment it seems a more likely guess than any other) that the proletarian dictatorship do finally succeed in building their Socialist order, industrialising Russia on an enormous scale, doubling, trebling, increasing ten or a hundredfold the yearly production of wealth. And suppose also that they succeed in maintaining continuously a just distribution of that wealth, and so raising every worker and peasant to an unheard-of level

After Bolshevism Succeeds

of social welfare. And (last and greatest of all) suppose that while they do that, they also increase the real effective personal liberties of the individual to a level unknown in Capitalist countries. These are enormous hypotheses. But if they are granted, if the reality works out like that, and if then the Russians take stock of all their welfare, will not still the most essential thing be wanting? For unhappily they will still be men, and in spite of moralists it is not true that man's injustice to man is the cause of all the evil in the world. Even enfranchised man is still mortal. Nothing will ever alter that, and nothing will ever reconcile our race to that unalterable doom. The human tragedy lies not so much in the certainty of fate, or in the ephemeral quality of human existence; all the animals are as ephemeral as mankind, or more, but no cloud of tragedy hangs about their heads. Our tragedy is that our minds are so made that we cannot keep out of them the persistent imagination that it might be otherwise. In the everlasting clash of desire and doom, the tragic and piteous element is not the doom but the desire, the human animal's unsubmissive resentment of the inevitable, the deep impossibility of resignation, the utter helplessness of all his wisdom in the face of his own instinctive will to live, his unregenerate passion for sheer survival.

So that after all three square meals a day and unlimited picture shows and fancy socks will never quite still our mortal craving for something we have not got. The major problems of life will still remain unsolved, and perhaps when we have more leisure to attend to them we shall be still more oppressed by the terribly obvious fact that they are insoluble. And so our imaginary successful Socialist of the next generation will then of necessity let his mind dwell a little upon many questions which in our generation he refuses (and rightly refuses) to consider with any feelings

This Russian Business

but those of impatient scorn. To the typical Communist of these days religion, transcendental philosophy, the origin and destiny of man, all the deep and far-off things of life are little better than red herrings deliberately trailed across his path by the designing Capitalist and his venal clerical hangers-on, with the single object of distracting the attention of the working classes from the terribly urgent job of abolishing the Capitalist, and turning capital itself to the common profit of the whole people. Nor, I think, can any honest man lay his hand upon his heart and say that these high things have never in any degree been prostituted to those base uses, nor even that such prostitution has been a rare or exceptional thing. In spite of large exceptions, it has been generally true that (consciously or unconsciously) religion, history, philosophy, science, abstract thought in all its forms, has contrived to win its freedom to contemplate all time by some preliminary obeisance to the age in which it lives. It has to come to terms with the society which gives it bread, and in a thousand ways, small and great, it temporises, it flatters Caesar for the sake of peace; it stands aloof from the urgent struggles of contemporary mankind; it makes no contribution to unpopular causes; it surveys the stars or searches the past only at the price of some implicit betrayal of the future earth.

Yet when all is said and done the stars are still there and the meaning of the world is yet unknown: at some time or other all these irrelevant questions will become most terribly relevant, all these red herrings will one day have to be eaten (or whatever is done to red herrings by those deluded brethren who weakly digress in their pursuits). A defender of Bolshevism might perhaps interject that the Bolsheviks do not neglect science, even now. On the contrary, they simply worship it. It is their God, or one of their gods. That is true, but I think it is mostly applied

After Bolshevism Succeeds

science that they worship, science which will set its shoulder to the wheels of the Five Years Plan, or some other later plan. And if then our Communist interjector ups and says that when the period of urgent construction is passed the triumphant Socialist State (if the Socialist State does triumph) is likely to be a far more enthusiastic supporter and fosterer of even abstract science than any other sort of State, I can only say that I believe that too may be true. But that will mean exactly what has already been suggested: the class struggle will sink into the background: the deeper and more hopeless struggle, the struggle that is human and nothing else, will be the very task that directly faces all those triumphant energies. After a glorious and hard-won victory they will suddenly turn a corner and come face to face with certain and abysmal defeat. And yet it might be reasonably argued that the sooner we get to that corner the better. For in the first place it is surely not true, in the long run, that men who found themselves in secure possession of material comfort would be less keenly interested in far-off abstract things or in the general human tragedy. Even now it is surely true that those who do most attend to such things are precisely those who have leisure, who have culture and knowledge, and who are not pressed hard by want or insecurity—the very advantages which the Socialist State promises its citizens, the first and chief stock-in-trade of its propaganda.

And then (always upon that same hypothesis of the triumph of Socialism according to its promises) a dreamer might prophesy that those tremendous and soaring energies which (by hypothesis) have brought to a successful conclusion what is admittedly the most gigantic material enterprise ever conceived by human brains and seriously attempted by human hands—a material enterprise which cannot go even a fraction of the way to success without

This Russian Business

enormous moral and spiritual forces being developed in the mass enthusiasm which so vast a labour implies and requires—that these energies will not for long falter before a different task, and that the result of their temporal triumph will be to enormously increase the sum total of courage, of patience, fortitude, and wisdom with which even now, and even in the remotest past, a small fragment of mankind at all times faces the central problem of the meaning of our own existence. The problem (he might admit) is perhaps insoluble, but sooner or later it had better be faced, and it can hardly be said that we have honestly faced the one problem that really concerns us while we waste nearly all the mental and spiritual powers of every generation in this tragic and sordid tomfoolery of wars and class oppressions and wanton squabbles and unnecessary poverty and almost universal ignorance.

But the contemporary Communist takes no such point of view. For him there is flatly no such problem. He brushes all these considerations aside as mere sentimentalism, or worse. He is the typical man of action, and he will tolerate no morbid introspection, no neurotic brooding over impossible things. He never thinks of death, and he is far too urgent that life ought to be lived thus and thus, to endure without irritation the intrusion of doubts as to whether it is worth living at all. If man is healthy enough (and to make him healthy is a mere matter of science and hygiene) he will never trouble his head about mortality until he is actually about to die, and then it will hardly matter. The Socialist citizen, in fact, will be the perfect Epicurean. Epicureanism is right, and Stoicism is wrong, just as Marxism is right, and other economic systems are wrong. There is no question of a continuous controversy, or of a permanent cleavage of opinion. Thinking is a function of living, and not vice versa. The new order will produce

After Bolshevism Succeeds

its own philosophy (indeed, it is already doing so), and pessimism and abstruse speculation will tend to wither and die in the drier air of science and common sense. For man is at bottom a reasonable animal. And if it turns out that he is not—but we shall see that things do not turn out that way. For if after all they do, we shall evidently have failed, and it will be somebody else's turn.

INDEX

- America, 28, 41, 43, 44, 45, 83, 86,
93, 102, 111, 129, 175, 224, 232,
233
Amritsar, 208
Armistice Day, 125
Athens, 57
Australia, 19, 189, 190
Austria, 40, 190
- Baldwin, 222
Berlin, 53, 57
Bloody Sunday, 19
Boyars, 60
Brazil, 190
- Canada, 28, 190
China, 177
Civil War, 20
Coalition Government, 61
Conrad, Joseph, 122
Constantinople, 57
Crusades, 26, 198, 240
Czar, 41, 63, 94, 112, 113, 116, 119,
121, 122, 125, 151, 168, 207, 210,
218, 233, 239, 248
- Denikin, 41, 210, 237
Disraeli, 17
Dnieper, 158
- Egyptians, 18
England, 28, 41, 45, 53, 59, 60, 68,
73, 74, 85, 91, 96, 102, 108, 117,
140, 158, 161, 168, 169, 189, 197,
199, 211, 221, 231
Englishmen, 60, 82, 92, 112, 169
Europe, 41, 43, 44, 65, 83, 98, 99,
102, 111, 117, 122, 123, 124, 163,
166, 167, 175, 181, 209, 226, 232,
238, 240, 241
- Fascism, 180, 181
Five Years Plan, 25 et seq., 39, 61,
66, 67, 75, 78, 82, 83, 100, 106,
149, 176, 178, 216, 219, 229, 231,
232, 238, 251
- Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul,
116, 117
France, 45, 59, 68, 74, 117, 154, 190,
208, 231
French Revolution, 26, 157, 206
- Georgia, 104
Germany, 40, 41, 45, 68, 74, 117,
154, 177, 187, 190, 231
Gladstone, 17
Gregory the Great, 178
- House of Commons, 188
House of Lords, 102, 189, 190, 191
- Ireland, 208
Italy, 180, 208
Ivan the Terrible, 113
- Jan Rudzutak, 9, 12, 13, 36
Japan, 123
Judenitch, 237
- Kerensky, 122
Kiev, 158, 177
Kolchak, 210, 237
Kremlin, 65, 112, 113, 116, 122
Kronstadt, 49
Kulaks, 107
- Labour Party, 85
Lenin, 12, 14, 17, 20, 21, 50, 105, 113,
114, 115, 118, 122, 125, 157
Leningrad, 7, 8, 11, 30, 40, 49, 50,
51, 56, 57, 94, 95, 111, 117, 139
London, 51, 53, 57, 60, 61, 76
Looking Backward, 8
Lord Chamberlain, 162, 168
- MacDonald, Ramsay, 164, 175, 222
Marx, Marxist, 11, 12, 17, 20, 25, 85,
101, 132, 133, 252
Menshevik, 210
Mexico, 190
Molotoff, 222

This Russian Business

- Moscow, 7, 30, 40, 43, 44, 52, 56, 57,
60, 63, 69, 70, 76, 89, 94, 99, 111,
112, 117, 122, 127, 178, 181, 195,
239
- Napoleon Bonaparte, 26, 33, 157
- Nepmen, 91, 107
- Neva, 49
- Nevsky Prospect, 50, 197
- New Economic Policy, 105, 106
- New World, 26, 41
- Nijni Novgorod, 47
- Ogpu, 195
- Paris, 51, 53, 57, 69, 87
- Patriarch Tikhon, 156
- Peterloo, 19
- Petersburg, 63
- Peter the Great, 50
- Place of Skulls, 113
- Poincaré, 164
- Pope Leo the Thirteenth, 130, 131,
134
- President of the Republic, 65
- Prime Minister, 33, 103, 109
- Prussians, 87
- Queen Victoria, 17
- Red Army, 113, 120, 157
- Red Flag, 18, 19, 113, 116, 117, 125
- Red Square, 44, 112, 113, 115, 122,
149
- Reformation, 26, 136, 183
- Renaissance, 26
- Roger Casement, 211
- Roman Empire, 136, 144, 146, 190
- Romanoffs, 60, 122
- St. Isaac's Cathedral, 139, 164
- Siberia, 19, 220
- Singapore, 208
- Slavs, 12, 44, 57, 92
- South Africa, 190
- Stalin, 12, 32, 43, 44, 122, 222
- Stalingrad, 50
- Sverdlov, 50, 113
- Switzerland, 190
- Thiers, 87
- Times, The*, 18, 217
- Tolstoi, 137
- Urals, 88
- Vorovski, 113
- Wrangel, 41, 210, 215, 237
- Zinovieff, 233

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



106 678

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY